University of Alberta

# The Experience of Students with Physical Disabilities in Physical Education

by

Donna Lynn Goodwin ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Physical Education and Recreation

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# Abstract

To facilitate the investigation of inclusive physical education, a definition and conceptual framework were developed. The definition acknowledged the appropriateness of the goals of the regular physical education program for students with disabilities and the need for teacher, student, and environmental support. The conceptual framework outlined the pre teaching, teaching, and post teaching components of program implementation and provided the structure for 2 empirical research studies.

The first study described the phenomenon of inclusive physical education from the perspective of students with disabilities. The experiences of 9 students (6 males and 3 females), mean age of 11 years 1 month, were captured by way of focus group interviews, field notes, and participant drawings. The thematic analysis uncovered a persistent dichotomy in how the participants experienced physical education. Good days were revealed in the themes of sense of belonging, skillful participation, and sharing in the benefits. Bad days were overshadowed by negative feelings revealed in the themes of social isolation, questioned competence, and restricted participation. The students' experiences were discussed within the conceptual framework of ecological perception and affordance theory (Gibson, 1977, 1979).

The second study investigated the role of classmates in the experiences of students with physical disabilities in regular physical education. The experiences of early, middle, and late elementary school-aged students (n=12) were captured using the phenomenological methods of focus groups, field notes, and visual artifacts. The thematic analysis revealed the students reacted differentially, by age, to the helping behaviour of classmates. The threat to self-esteem model (Nadler & Fisher, 1986) facilitated interpretation of the data, revealing instrumental and caring classmate behaviour across all age groups. Consensual help emerged with the late elementary group. Restricting independence was perceived to be self-threatening for all students, as was non instrumental and self-esteem threatening support for the 2 older groups. The implications of helping behaviour on motivation for self-help and dependency states were discussed. Insights into the legitimacy of the definition and conceptual framework of inclusive physical education, derived from two empirical studies, appear in the concluding chapter.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

The provision of appropriate educational experiences for all students within the regular classroom and mainstream of school life reflects the current educational ideology of inclusive education. Students with physical disabilities or learning challenges, as well as those at risk or who are gifted, receive their education from general education teachers (Stainback & Stainback, 1990; York, Vandercook, McDonald, Heise-Neff, & Caughey, 1992). The ideology of inclusive education emanated from dissatisfaction with the earlier educational perspective of integration. Integration reflected a service-based model, founded on the assumption that special programming, within protected environments, would be followed by successful placement in regular settings (Polloway, Smith, Patton, Smith, 1996). In essence, students were asked to "earn their way" out of special education classrooms if they were to join their peers in regular classrooms (Gartner & Kerzner Lipsky, 1996). This dual system of education labeled and grouped students to take advantage of technical support and teacher or consultant expertise.

Advocates for inclusive education rejected the notion of protected environments, stating that students with disabilities learn more in the regular classroom than they do in segregated settings. In addition, the general school population learns to interact and communicate with others according to individual strengths rather than stereotypic generalizations and inclusive education experiences better prepare students for community living (Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Kerzner Lipsky, & Gartner, 1992). Inclusive education reflects a commitment to a support based model of education that places the student in the inclusive setting from the outset. The model presumes that necessary technical and educational supports will be provided on an ongoing basis, thereby ensuring success and continuation in the inclusive setting. An unfortunate paradox of inclusive education, however, is that the supports necessary for success are not always known, provided, or empirically evaluated (LaMaster, Gall, Kinchin, & Seidentop, 1998; Watkinson & Bentz, 1986).

A lack of technical and education support to inclusive education, including inclusive physical education, has resulted in it meaning different things to different people

(Kauffman, 1995; Sherrill, 1994). The goals of physical education, as they apply to students with disabilities, have been interpreted widely (Davis, 1989; Sherrill & Montelione, 1990) and the question of relevant and ecologically valid content prevails (Davis & Burton, 1991). The need to clarify the educational experiences and supports required for successful inclusion is overwhelming (Sherrill & Williams, 1996).

## The Experiences of Students

Teacher competence is a reflection of pedagogical tactfulness, or what van Manen (1986) calls a special kind of knowledge. It is sustained by a certain kind of seeing, listening, and responding. He suggests that teacher competence is more than professional or clinical knowledge; it is the knowledge that comes from the thoughtfulness that results from asking the question, "How is the child experiencing this situation" (p. 8)? It is this underlying ethic of caring that guides our interactions and responses to children (Clandinin, 1993). Seeking to meet the needs of students by modifying and manipulating activities may be of little consequence if we are not mindful of how the students are experiencing the activity.

Although students are central to the education process, until recently, the meanings they ascribe to their experiences have been forgotten or overlooked. This oversight may be a reflection of our adult tendency to impute our perceptual world to that of children. We have tended to "work with children" to prepare them for the seriousness of adult life rather than "understand" children for what they can do and how they participate in the world (Greig & Taylor, 1999; Waksler, 1991).

The subjective experience of what students think, feel, and know about their participation in physical education has received little attention conceptually or in the empirical research (Graham, 1995) and has remained largely outside the interest area of those of us working in the area of inclusive physical education. The studies presented in this dissertation will attempt to further our understanding of how students with physical disabilities are experiencing physical education. Two hermeneutic phenomenological research studies, related to the experience of students with physical disabilities, are presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

These studies are preceded by a chapter which deliberates over the various interpretations of inclusive physical education, reflecting our current thinking of this complex phenomenon. The definition presented in Chapter 2 identifies the goals of inclusive physical education and acknowledges the need for teacher, student, and environmental supports to achieve active participation.

A conceptual framework was also developed. The framework, although rudimentary, provided both structure and boundaries for the discussion and investigation of inclusive physical education. It provided a visual conceptualization of the context, consequences, and interrelationships among variables evident in inclusive physical education programs (Ennis, 1999). It guided me in the development of my research program, has been helpful in increasing my ability to communicate my ideas and interests to others, and continues to provide a rationale for the focus of my research. Undoubtedly, new pieces will be added to the framework over time as our knowledge of teaching and learning in inclusive physical education environments increases.

Chapter 3 presents the findings of a descriptive study into the meaning of inclusive physical education from the perspective of students with physical disabilities. The experiences of 9 students with physical disabilities, mean age of 11 years, are portrayed. The thematic analysis of interview and artifact data uncovered a persistent dichotomy in how physical education was experienced. Good days and bad days were interpreted and discussed within the framework of affordance theory (Gibson, 1979). When the students described bad days, it was often within the context of how they were perceived by their classmates, and the degree to which they were isolated. Good days were revealed with themes of belonging and being able to share in the benefits of the program through supported participation.

"Research is a continuing process which not only provides answers but generates additional questions" (Progen & DeSensi, 1984, p. 87). In listening to the participants of the first study, it became clear that classmates played a defining role in how students with disabilities perceived their experiences in physical education. The study presented in Chapter 4 investigated the role of classmates further. It describes the everyday interactions students with physical disabilities had with their classmates in physical education. The study explicates the nature of the interactions, how the participants reacted, and the meanings they ascribed to these interactions. The results indicated that students reacted differentially to peer support, by age. The younger participants were more positive in their evaluation of peer interactions than their older counterparts. The older participants perceived peer support to be a mixed blessing as peer interactions could be both supportive and threatening to their self-esteems.

The final chapter discusses the significance of the two studies in light of the definition and conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2. The three papers, taken together, contribute to a broadened understanding of inclusive physical education. Most significantly, the voices of students with disabilities have been added to that of teachers, parents, administrators, and researchers.

## A Qualitative Perspective

Coming to understand inclusive physical education from the perspective of students with disabilities requires an in-depth understanding of their day to day experiences. Human science, as opposed to natural science, aims to understand the fullness of everyday situations by reconstructing the meanings of life's experiences (van Manen, 1994). Qualitative researchers attempt to make sense of, or interpret meaning given to everyday life by examining idiographic descriptions of the social world. The qualitative approach provides a systematic and disciplined methodology for deriving knowledge through description, interpretation, and self-reflection (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). It involves the studied use and collection of various empirical materials such as interview texts, observational data, visual artifacts, life stories, historical documents, and personal experience.

Phenomenology is a method of choice when seeking to understand, make sense of, and elicit the meaning of, a phenomenon (Morse & Field, 1995). Coming to grips with the meaning of experience is a reflective activity of considerable labour which involves the recovery of frequently occurring elements that embody and dramatize its meaning (Kvale, 1983; van Manen, 1994). The main characteristics of the phenomenological method are: a) focusing on the nature of the lived experience; b) conducting intense dialogues with people about the meaning of an experience; c) developing themes from listening and analyzing transcripts, from observational research, analysis of participant products such as drawings, and the use of visual information such as video tapes, and photographs and; d) reflecting deeply on the meaning of the whole experience (Kvale, 1983). The underlying dynamics or structures that account for an experience provide the central meaning that enables one to understand the substance or essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a study of the interpretation of texts for the purpose of obtaining a valid and common understanding of them so that the intention and meaning behind the experiences are fully understood (Moustakas, 1994). According to Packer (1985), "...the hermeneutic approach seeks to elucidate and make explicit our practical understanding of human actions by providing an interpretation of them." (p. 1088). Part of the appeal of using hermeneutic phenomenology in the area of education rests with the significant pedagogic reflections elicited by the experiences of students which can motivate researchers to be reflective educators as well as observers of life.

There are a number of assumptions underlying qualitative research. Placing these assumptions before the reader assists with ascertaining the appropriateness of the strategies, techniques, and methods employed as well as providing criteria for judging the credibility of the conclusions which are consistent with the research form. The first assumption is that human beings are social and our understanding of the world around us evolves from a background of shared practice and experience within the human community (Benner, 1994). The constraints of everyday life add up to an understanding of what is significant to us.

Secondly, subjective experience is worthy of study. We value the outcomes of the social world and how they are given meaning as they can help us understand who we are and the world in which we live (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). We would not be able to study subjective experience if people did not have the desire to share their experiences through the expressed words of language (Lederman, 1990; Sparkes, 1995). If people are approached in a sensitive manner verbalizations can be collected and treated as scientific data that can be recorded, observed, and analyzed like any other behavior (Ericsson & Simon, 1984).

The researcher is part of the circle of understanding (Gadamer, 1988). Researchers understand and interpret something as something because of a background of shared experience. Observing, asking questions, and interacting with research participants permits the qualitative researcher to become immersed in the setting or lives of others. This gift of presence makes the researched phenomena accessible and tangible (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Lastly, research is undertaken so that what is learned in one setting can be applied to other settings (Johnson, 1997). As such, the question of generalizability of findings is highly relevant to qualitative researchers. However, this discussion is often engulfed in what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as the nomothetic-idiographic dilemma. As they point out, nomothetic implies "based on law" and the term idiographic implies "based on the particular individual" (p. 116).

Generalizability, or external validity, has traditionally been associated with the degree to which findings can be generalized to other populations, settings, treatment and measurement variables (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), and time (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Subjects are selected at random from a population and with the support of inferential statistics, a confidence level of generalizing from the selected sample to the population at large are stated in probability coefficients (Kvale, 1996). A reliance on sampling theory, or what has been referred to as vertical generalization, presumes that if the same sampling procedures were performed on the same population to secure another sample, the findings would be expected to be repeated (Johnson, 1997). Generalizations in this sense are nomothetic in nature, meaning that they are law like and apply universally (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The appropriateness of modeling social science on the nomothetic generalizations of the physical sciences has been questioned. Although external validity may be the goal of many researchers, the achievability of random sampling and the threats to external validity caused by the statistical interaction effects of person by treatment interaction have caused some to view the generalizability of group designs with some pessimism (Bouffard, 1993; Cronbach 1975). Cronbach (1975) suggests that because generalizations within the social sciences are contextually relative, they are subject to decay and should be construed as working hypotheses. Generalizability is no longer considered to be a binary construct, but rather, one that is expressed along a continuum (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Cronbach's (1980) rejection of broad nomothetic generalizations, in support of the working hypothesis, paves the way for the notion of extrapolation. "Extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions. Extrapolations are logical, thoughtful, and problem oriented rather than statistical and probabilistic" (Patton, 1990, p. 489).

Quantitative and qualitative researchers alike are turning to nonstatistical arguments to make the link between what was observed in one setting and what may be occurring in another (Johnson, 1997; Kennedy, 1979). The ideographic nature of qualitative research is aimed at enriched understanding and enlarged insight by addressing a unique case or limited set of cases. As such, the conventional criteria for generalization are not appropriate, nor desirable for qualitative studies (Schofield, 1990).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide a way of dealing with the paradox of focus on the particular and a simultaneous interest in the general. They suggested reframing generalization to reflect *transferability and fittingness*. There is support for transferability of findings when there is a high degree of fittingness between the transferring context and the receiving context (Kennedy, 1979; Schofield, 1990).

Transferability hinges upon the extent to which the attributes compared are relevant and the information about both contexts is known. Appropriate judgements about the transferability of the information can be made when the inquirer provides rich, thick descriptions of the context and the circumstances of the situation (Kvale, 1996; Schwandt, 1997).

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# Chapter Two

## Inclusive Physical Education: A Conceptual Framework[1]

To develop and maintain commitment to inclusive physical education, teachers, parents, and administrators need to have a clear understanding of that to which they are being asked to commit and how it will be undertaken (Hamre-Nietupski, 1993). The purpose of this paper is to present a definition of inclusive physical education that reflects our current understanding of the phenomenon. During the process of developing the definition, the complexity of the phenomenon became apparent. A single definition would not capture all the variables that needed to be considered when thinking about and discussing this educational ideology. As a result, a conceptual framework was also developed. The framework identifies the variables contributing to inclusive physical education and their patterns of relationships, both of which are valuable for guiding professional practice and providing structure for empirical study (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The interpretation and day to day implementation of inclusive physical education has been largely left to regular physical education teachers (Decker & Jansma, 1995). This has resulted in differing interpretations of program goals, content, instructional context, and needed support structures across school districts, schools, and even individual gymnasia (Karper & Martinek, 1985).

The dynamic and complex nature of inclusive physical education has been evident in the conceptual writings of many of the leaders in adapted physical activity. Such writers have addressed adaptations to the curriculum (Block & Vogler, 1994), as well as strategies for individualizing assessment and instruction which incorporate student choice and decision making (Davis & Burton, 1991). They have investigated the social acceptance of individual differences through frequent, long term, positive, and mutually respectful peer interactions (Tripp & Sherrill, 1991; Sherrill, Heikinaro-Johansson, & Slininger, 1994). Sharing the responsibility of participation with peers, parents, paraprofessionals, and professionals through collaborative working relationships has also been explored (Maguire, 1994). Karper and Martinek (1985) contend that the believability, replicability, and generalizability of school based research would be enhanced with a clearer understanding of the content and context of inclusive physical education.

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There are a number of themes that run through our current understanding of inclusive physical education. First is the philosophical and social issue of placement or *where* students with disabilities receive their education; that is in, regular classrooms or special education classrooms? Special education reform was precipitated by a lack of satisfaction with the principle of least restrictive environments (LRE). The principle was most commonly represented by the Cascade Model and referred to the right of students to be educated in the setting most like the educational setting of students without disabilities (Friend, Bursuck, & Hutchinson, 1998). Originally conceived at a time when the only option to regular classroom membership was total exclusion, it was represented by a hierarchical continuum of services including segregated settings, part-time participation in regular settings, and total inclusion (Wehman, Sherron, & West, 1997). The principle of LRE was supported by adapted physical educators and modified for physical education settings. The intent was to provide support services for students with disabilities with the aim of moving students through the continuum of options toward the ultimate goal of regular physical educational placement alongside nondisabled peers.

The principle of LRE came under criticism, however (see Block & Krebs, 1992 for an in-depth discussion of LRE), for perpetuating the labeling of students at the macro level, by characteristics (e.g., learning disabled, emotionally disturbed). These generalized characteristics were then broadly applied to instructional planning (Kauffman, 1995; Wang, 1996). Further, LRE supported the primacy of professional decision making, as students had to "earn" their way out of more restrictive environments if they were to progress through the continuum (Lipsky & Gartner, 1992; Polloway, Smith, Patton, & Smith, 1996). Although historically recommended, least restrictive environments appeared to have seen limited implementation (Decker & Jansma, 1995).

Current ideology promotes the educational and social merits of the regular classroom for all students, from early childhood programs, during elementary grades, and through secondary school (Friend et al., 1998). Inclusive classrooms have been promoted over other settings as all children are seen to be valued, can learn, and belong in the mainstream of school and community life. Diversity is a valued and celebrated reflection of the human condition, which strengthens classrooms and provides greater learning opportunities for everyone (Jacobsen & Sawatsky, 1993; Stainback & Stainback, 1996). As many students with disabilities are already involved in regular physical education programs (Decker & Jansma, 1995) the prominence of the *where* debate has faded from recent literature (Block & Vogler, 1994; Sherrill, 1994).

A second theme that runs through our discussion of inclusive physical education is the *what*. Should we teach students with disabilities the regular curriculum or is something different desired or needed? Endorsing the *where* (i.e, regular physical education program) as one of the delineating features of inclusive physical education presupposed the appropriateness of the goals and objectives of the regular program for students with disabilities. To suggest otherwise presents a contradiction between the *where* and the *what* that cannot be easily resolved. Recommending placement in the regular physical education program while advocating for alternate program content may in essence be promoting the creation of a program within an existing program, thereby bringing us full circle in the inclusion debate. Separate program content could result in removing students with disabilities from interaction with classmates and an increased work load for teachers (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

Closely associated with the *what* theme is the *how* theme. Once determined, *how* is the curriculum best implemented? Are some instructional strategies better suited to the needs of students with disabilities than others? Are support services and aides needed, and if so, what are they, and to what extent are they needed? These questions have yet to be fully answered. Although the *where* question may have reached resolution for the time being, the *whats* and the *hows* of inclusive physical education appear to be operating at a conceptual level of understanding and knowledge.

## A Definition

Reid (1992) reminds us that language is a dynamic and evolving system and that we must expect changes in its interpretation as societal values and beliefs evolve and change. As such, our understanding of inclusive physical education is maturing over time.

We no longer focus only on *where* students receive their physical education program or how well students with disabilities "fit into" the regular physical education program.

Our pedagogical focus has shifted to a more ecological view of the larger instructional setting. We acknowledge the complex roles of classmates, teachers, and administrators while also recognizing the importance of support systems such as families, paraprofessionals, adapted physical education consultants, and adapted equipment or specially designed environments (Sherrill, 1994). We also acknowledge the appropriateness of the goals of regular physical education within this supported environment.

> Inclusive physical education means providing all students with disabilities the opportunity to participate in regular physical education with their peers, with supplementary aides and support services as needed to take full advantage of the goals of motor skill acquisition, fitness, knowledge of movement, and psycho social well being, toward the preparation of students for an active lifestyle appropriate to their abilities and interests.

### Goals of Inclusive Physical Education

There are four generally agreed upon goals of physical education: (a) knowledge acquisition and application; (b) motor skill acquisition; (c) health related fitness and; (d) psycho social well being (Arnold, 1991; Graham,1987). The goal of knowledge in physical education can be viewed in a number of ways. Fundamentally, Gross (1978) reminds us, "Whether the individual is to become a sports announcer or a television foot ball fan, he/she still needs a basic knowledge of how the game is played" (p. 1).

From a motor learning perspective, declarative and procedural knowledge are fundamental to the learning and performance of motor skills. Knowledge about action that is stored in memory and can influence the development and execution of skilled action has been referred to as declarative knowledge (Wall, 1986; Wall et al., 1985). Depending on the learner, it can include knowledge of biomechanics, motor learning principles, and activity specific information such as timing, stance, swing, and follow-through. Knowledge about how to perform or use the information to control and execute skilled movement is procedural knowledge (Ennis, 1994). Both are crucial to skill acquisition and thus are basic to participation in physical education irrespective of the presence or absence of a disability.

The practical application of declarative and procedural knowledge occurs during the process of motor skill acquisition. Whereas the motor domain is central to physical education, motor skill acquisition is fundamental to the curriculum (Arnold, 1991; Davis, 1989; Sherrill & Montelione, 1990). Students are expected to participate in a range of activities and to do so requires a minimal level of skill proficiency that can only be achieved with appropriate opportunities for practice (Wall, 1982). But, is the goal of motor skill acquisition attainable by students with disabilities? We join others in replying, yes (Block, 1992; Sherrill, 1998; Stein, 1987). However, the context of assessment and instruction must be conceptualized from a functional outcome perspective and not from a normative developmental sequence perspective (Davis & Burton, 1991).

As early as 1978 there was a call to individualize instruction by allowing the student to perform standard skills in the most functional manner possible (Grosse, 1978). If the curriculum is interpreted from a traditional motor development perspective that defines performance attributes solely by the achievement of hierarchical stages of skill proficiency, then the goal of motor skill acquisition may indeed be unattainable by, and inappropriate for, many students.

An alternative approach to motor skill acquisition has been proposed. Ecological task analysis (Davis & Burton, 1991) links the requirements of the task to environmental conditions and performer capacities. In this approach, curriculum activities are categorized by function and intention (i.e., moving from one point to another, propelling a stationary or moving object or person, receiving a stationary or moving object or person, and changing position relative to an object, person, terrain, or event). Achieving the outcome of the task (e.g., getting the volleyball into the opponent's court) takes precedence over achieving the "correct' movement form for an overhand volleyball serve, for example. Students, with the support of the teacher, are freed to discover the movement form that best meets the movement outcome, as dictated by the task. The solutions are collaboratively determined through exploration and self-discovery by the student and direct instruction by the teacher (Burton & Davis, 1996). An ecological task analysis approach to assessment and instruction removes the onerous responsibility of having to know, or presuming to know, the best movement form for students with disabilities. This approach is consistent with the goal of skill acquisition and hence well suited to inclusive physical education programs.

Endorsing the goals of motor skill acquisition also removes us, one more step, from previous models of disability which emphasized individual weakness and physical rehabilitation to ameliorate problems. Our current understanding validates the capabilities of persons with disabilities and their capacity for development and self-determination. Instructional accountability in inclusive physical education rests with the recognition that the goals of the regular physical education program are purposeful and meaningful for all students (Davis, 1989). The degree to which specific activities within program dimensions of the curriculum (e.g., dance, gymnastics, aquatics, individual and team activities) are suited for all students remains open for discussion however.

The goal of fitness is promoted in physical education curricula. Only in so far as fitness can be shown to assist functional participation in the activities of the curriculum, can it be regarded as serving an educational objective for any student (Arnold, 1991). Unfortunately, the number of minutes per week dedicated to physical education may not be sufficient to develop an increased level of cardiovascular fitness. Furthermore, if circuit training, aerobic exercises, or calisthenics are used to meet the curricular goal of fitness, the educational component is lost to simple physical conditioning. The students must be simultaneously developing an understanding of what they are doing, and why they are doing it. It is the educational worthwhileness of fitness that makes this goal appropriate for students with disabilities. Ultimately, fitness is an individual matter that requires personal commitment to daily activities that will address cardiovascular efficiency, strength, muscular endurance, and flexibility (Arnold, 1991).

Students with disabilities were frequently placed in regular physical education on the belief that it would contribute to a wider degree of social acceptance of disability. The social context (peers, teachers, environment), through personal contact with persons with disabilities, would move toward an atmosphere of increased acceptance of, and appreciation for, human diversity. The goal of psychosocial well being implies that social development is not necessarily consistent with social acceptance by others, but rather that the larger social context must be one that allows for individual expression. An increased tolerance of individuality promotes a social context in which students with disabilities experience a sense of belonging and acceptance because of who they are and not how much they conform to their peer groups (Sherrill & Montelione, 1990).

## A Conceptual Framework

The need for consultation to inclusive physical education programs has become increasingly important. The consultant's role is extremely diverse and very challenging (Block & Conatser, 1999; Heikinaro-Johansson, Sherrill, French, & Huuhka, 1995). Consultants are asked to address problems as diverse as a mismatch between a teacher's value system and the school district's commitment to a support based model of education, fears about the safety of the students in the class, a lack of general preparation in the teaching of physical education, inadequacy of facilities or equipment, paucity of supports to implement the program, over-protective parents, and students with limited motor skill repertoires.

A framework which identifies the interacting variables in the inclusive physical education environment would be valuable during the first step of a consultation process, the needs assessment. During a needs assessment the consultant assists the teacher to identify, clarify, and prioritize concerns. Although the consultation process is most often initiated by the teacher (Block & Conatser, 1999), the exact nature of the concern, at times, cannot be articulated beyond a sense that things were not going well. The conceptual framework would provide a systematic way of identifying the nature of the concerns and thereby facilitate problem solving. Concerns over a school administrator's relegation of instructional assistance support within the school and the need for a volunteer to assist with the upcoming aquatics program, although related, may require very different action plans. Similarly, a teacher who does not see the benefits of the physical education program for students with disabilities will not be responsive to program modifications, no matter how brilliant or appropriate they may be, designed to increase the student's participation in the program,

If "best practices" in inclusive physical education are to be built upon more than personal insight and positive intentions, applied research must play a prominent role in guiding practice. Although a conceptual framework is useful for visualizing and revealing patterns of relationships among interacting instructional variables, it can also be useful in providing structure and boundaries for empirical study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Snow, 1973).

The presence or development of a conceptual framework also implies a commitment, however preliminary, to a research program. The systematic ordering of ideas about a phenomenon takes advantage of previous knowledge and guards against what has been called "...dust bowl empiricism, in which an investigator looks to understand whatever is to be found with little prior consideration for that which may be most valuable" (Gage, 1963b, p. 102). Even though only a small part of the framework may be addressed in any one research project, the framework or sense of whole, remains in the background (Gage, 1963c). As such, the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 2-1 was developed as a guide to professional practice and to provide direction and structure for the research of this dissertation (Sowden & Keeves, 1988).

The conceptual framework was adapted from a model for classroom teaching by Dunkin and Biddle (1974). The model distinguishes between four regions: presage, context, process, and product variables. The *presage* variables are concerned with the characteristics of teachers and the effects of these characteristics on the teaching process. For example, an inexperienced teacher's formative background (e.g., social class, age), or a veteran teacher's experiences (e.g., repeated years of single grade teaching) may influence the teaching process. Similarly, the experiences gained at university during teacher preparation, practice-teaching, through in-service development, or post graduate education may also influence classroom instruction. Teacher properties such as attitudes, beliefs, motives, and abilities may also have a potential effect on teaching.

*Context* variables include those characteristics of the environment to which the teacher must adjust. It may include the physical building, budget constraints, or the influences of the parent association. Students are also included within the context region. Like teachers, students possess characteristics that can influence the instructional setting.

*Process* variables concern the actual activities and behaviors of teachers and students in the classroom. Only those behaviors that are overt and can be measured are deemed to be process variables according to Dunkin and Biddle (1974). Teacher behaviors have been the primary focus of research on the teaching process.

*Product* variables concern change in students, or the outcome of teaching resulting from participation in classroom activities with the teacher and other students. Within this model, student growth, as measured by subject-matter learning, is presumed to be an indicator of teaching effectiveness.

A strength of the Dunkin and Biddle model of teaching, over earlier models, was its explicit recognition of student behaviour as a process variable, and the influence of context variables as something with which teachers must contend. Previous models defined research on teaching as that which placed the behaviour or characteristics of the teacher as the central variable (Gage, 1963a, 1963c). Research on teaching was aimed at the identification and measurement of teacher behaviour and revealing their consequences on student growth. The three central categories of this early research on teaching involved teaching methods (e.g., lecturing, project model), instruments of teaching (e.g., textbooks, films), and teacher personality and characteristics (e.g., subject knowledge, intelligence) (Gage, 1963c). Although other relevant variables, such as social interaction and the social background provided by the school, home, and community at large were noted to be part of the larger landscape "they are neither necessary nor sufficient to characterize a piece of research as research on teaching" (Gage, 1963c p. vii).

Gage set the stage for the "criteria for effectiveness paradigm" or what has come to be known as the "process-product" paradigm of educational research (Gage, 1963b, Garrison & Macmillan, 1984). Research on teaching (e.g., teaching styles, teaching methods) became synonymous with the identification of criterion or set of criteria teachers might implement to bring about effectiveness (the product) as reflected by student change (e.g., achievement and attitude). The assumption of causality in this paradigm is evident as the causes or teacher behaviours that bring about student change are sought. Doyle (1975) suggests that "two factor causal analyses - i.e., where teacher behaviour and student achievement are the only two factors considered - overlook the importance of the mediating processes of student activities and of the classroom ecology" (p. 62). The activities of the student, according to Doyle, were skipped over in the search for a causal relationship between the teacher's activities, and the students' achievement.

According to Dewey (1938), "Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time" (p. 48). What might students learn or not learn because of the way learning was experienced? Dewey contemplates the quality of the educational experience and advocates that the business of the school is more than the transmission of bodies of information to the new generation. Relating to students as a "class" rather than a "social group", contributes to teachers acting largely from the outside. Relating to students as a social group changes the compulsion of control to that of facilitating exchange.

Dewey's (1938) theory of experience is based on two principles, continuity and interaction. Experiences can be judged as educational only to the degree with which they are agreeable and they have an influence upon later experiences. "...the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35). Secondly, the educational experience should be interpreted as an interaction, with equal weighting being given to the objective conditions of the environment as well as internal conditions of the learning. It is the violation of this principle which brings the largest criticism of process-product models of teaching, including that of Dunkin and Biddle (1974). Educational research has taken a one sided view of teaching and sought to identify, measure, and correlate teacher and context variables to student achievement (Garrison & Macmillan, 1984). The experience of the student had been all but ignored in our quest to advance our understanding of teaching, and in particular the phenomenon of inclusive physical education.

To address this major shortcoming, researchers in the area of adapted physical activity have adapted the Dunkin and Biddle (1974) model. DePauw and Goc Karp (1992) incorporated the four regions of presage, context, process, and product within a socio-historical and socio-cultural framework for pedagogic research for diverse learners. Heikinaro-Johansson's (1995) studies on including students with special needs in physical education were also based on a framework adapted from Dunkin and Biddle (1974). She however, expanded the outcome region to explicitly include both teacher and student experiences as outcomes of the inclusive physical education program, although this region of the framework is not directly addressed in her studies.

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 2-1 adapts the Dunkin and Biddle model further. It incorporates the presage (teacher values), context (student variables), process (thoughtful instruction, shared responsibility), and product (teacher and student experiences) regions of the model, but the focus on the teacher effectiveness alone, as measured by student achievement (process-product paradigm) has been expanded. The notion of shared *responsibility* within the instructional process, and student and teacher *experience* as an outcome of the instructional process have been incorporated.

The phases of implementation of an inclusive physical education program include information gathering and synthesis, program execution, student and teacher change, and evaluation (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974). These temporally sequenced activities have been referred to as pre teaching, teaching, and post teaching responsibilities (Kysela, French, & Brenton-Haden, 1993). The constituent elements within each phase will be briefly explained. The intent is not to present a review of the related literature in each area, but to describe their interactive and multidirectional nature.

### Student Variables

Information about who the student is and what the student brings to the learning environment is an important component of the inclusive physical education context. Consequently, students with disabilities have been the focus of study for researchers in the area of adapted physical activity for some time. A considerable early research legacy has resulted in an abundant accumulation of knowledge in such areas as fitness, motor learning, motor skill acquisition, and attitudes toward physical activity (Broadhead, 1986; Pyfer, 1986). Research in the biological, social psychological, behavioral and cognitive domains of persons with disabilities and physical activity continues to be represented in the current literature (Broadhead & Burton, 1996).

### Instructional Program

An organized and purposeful approach to teaching requires an understanding of the goals and objectives of the instructional program as well as a working knowledge of the curriculum. We are purporting the appropriateness of the regular physical education program for students with disabilities. The ultimate success of the program, however, for students and teachers, lies with its implementation. Program implementation is, in turn, linked to teacher values, thoughtful instructional practices, and a shared responsibility for all students' success. The multidirectional influences of the variables identified in the conceptual framework is apparent.

### Teacher Values

Embedded within the implementation of physical education programs are the teachers' value systems. Considerable research energy has been committed to determining the attitudes of teachers toward students with disabilities (e.g., Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991, 1992; Rowe & Stutts, 1987; Santomier, 1985). Although this research is of extreme value, alone it leads to the assumption that beliefs and moral commitments about what is 'good' and 'should work' is enough to sustain and guide inclusive education practices (LaMaster, Gall, Kinchin, & Seidentop, 1998). Research on teachers' values is but one piece of a very complex phenomenon.

### Thoughtful Instruction

Teaching tasks are those that facilitate "on the floor" student success. The effective use of available resources and ongoing adjustment to the lesson are characteristic of thoughtful and effective instruction. Although many adapted physical education specialists advocate individualizing instruction by adapting equipment, modifying activities, and providing instructional support (e.g., peer tutors), there has been little empirical evidence supporting these premises (Davis & Burton, 1991).

Proponents of inclusion often advocate on behalf of all children, but when carefully questioned, they may actually be advocating on behalf of children with very specific needs and abilities, e.g., students with multiple disabilities or those with developmental disabilities. The extent to which instructional strategies applicable to one disability can be generalized to another is uncertain. Is it possible some instructional approaches can be broadly applied, or are all students be to viewed as individuals (Sherrill & Williams, 1996)? Further investigation into pedagogic strategies and practice required to individualize educational experiences for diverse groups within the physical education classroom is needed.

### Shared Responsibility

The current conceptual framework expands upon the previous frameworks by including the notion of shared responsibility (Jacobsen & Sawatsky, 1993; Sherrill, 1994). Classmates and instructional assistants, as well as teachers, students, and administrators are fundamental to the inclusion process. By placing inclusive physical education within a social context, the accountability for its success immediately moves beyond that of the student with a disability.

A genuine commitment to quality programs for students with disabilities requires a school and system wide commitment (Stainback & Stainback, 1996). The range of student abilities and needs in inclusive classrooms may surpass the resources available to one teacher. Group problem solving and the sharing of program responsibilities can bring diversity to instructional methodology and an expanded interpretation of the curriculum (Kysela et al., 1993). From a pragmatic point of view, partnerships among students, parents, paraprofessionals, administrators, and other professionals may be a necessary corequisite of inclusive education.

Sharing responsibility for inclusive physical education assumes there is agreement among those who may have input into the students' programs (e.g., teacher, physical therapist, parent). In addition to agreement among the partners, there must also be a commitment to equal access of information and participation in problem identification, discussions, and decision making (Stein, 1994; Wang, 1996). Bringing about successful collaboration remains an ongoing challenge (Jacobsen & Sawatsky, 1993) as the support systems most needed by teachers and students, the extent of the support, and systems for its delivery continue to be identified.

### Teacher and Student Experiences

Post-teaching involves comparing the planning and implementation phases of the process to the outcomes and experiences of the students and teachers. Whereas research has addressed such outcomes as fitness and skill acquisition (e.g, Harvey & Reid, 1997; Jansma, Decker, Ersing, McCubbin, & Combs, 1985; Winnick, 1985) little attention has been given to the post teaching experiences of teachers or students with disabilities.

The voice of students has been all but missing from the discussion of inclusive physical education. The professional and research literature that was reviewed did not bring the perspective of students forward. Nor were students present in much of the adapted physical education consulting completed within a large urban school district by the first author prior to undertaking the current study of inclusive physical education. Although the students' best interests were always central to the consulting process, seldom were the students themselves actively involved in the decision making process. Discomfort with the omission of students in our discussions became the motivation for giving voice to students with physical disabilities.

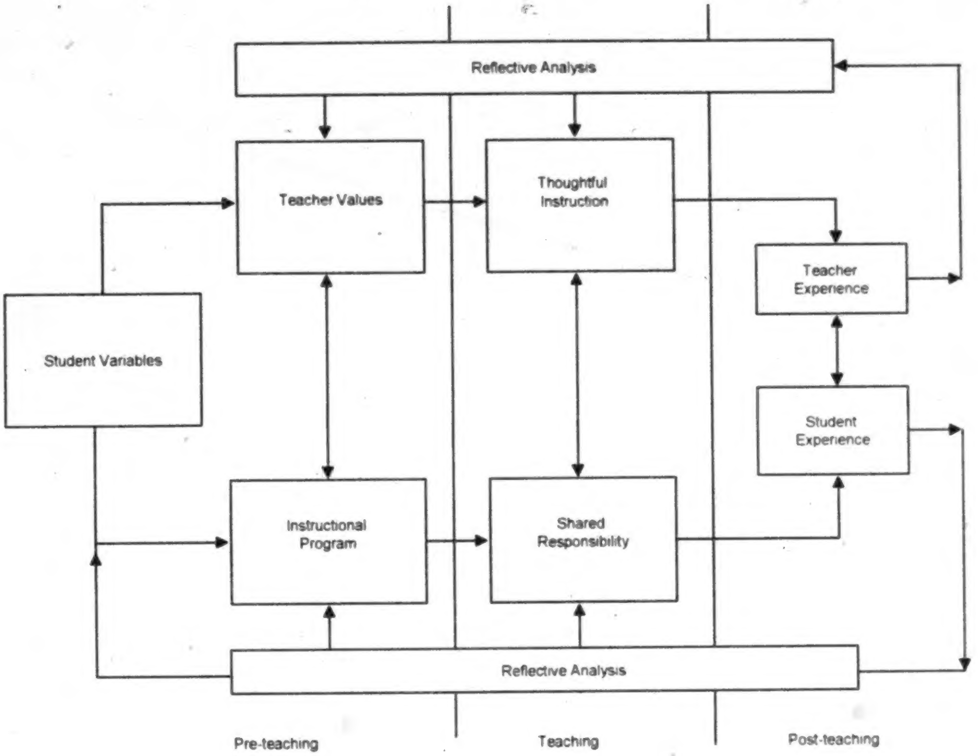
Reflective Analysis
Teacher Values
Thoughtful Instruction
Teacher Experience
Student Variables
Student Experience
Instructional Program
Shared Responsibility
Reflective Analysis
Pre-teaching
Teaching
Post-teaching

Figure 2-1. A conceptual framework for the study and practice of inclusive physical education.

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# Chapter Three

## Listening to Students' Voices

Inclusive physical education has been studied from a number of perspectives. The appropriateness of the regular physical education curriculum as applied to students with disabilities has been debated. Although there appears to be general agreement that the goals of physical education are appropriate for most, if not all children, the curriculum content itself remains an area of ongoing investigation (Davis, 1989; Rizzo, Davis, & Toussaint, 1994; Sherrill, & Montelione, 1990; Stein, 1987). Closely linked to the appropriateness of the dimensions or objectives of the curriculum (e.g., games, dance, gymnastics) is need to individualize instructional methods. The increasing diversity in student abilities and interests suggests that a functional and supported approach to completing task goals may be needed to promote successful and meaningful participation in the program (Block, Oberweiser, & Bain, 1995; Davis & Burton, 1991).

The need for a partnership among a number of key people involved in the inclusive physical education process has also been recognized as being fundamental to student success. The attitudes of teachers toward students with disabilities has been investigated (Giangreco, Dennis, Clonginger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991, 1992) as has the effects of including students with disabilities on nondisabled children (Block & Zeman, 1996). Others have also contributed to the discussions of inclusive physical education. Administrators have been questioned about their interpretation of inclusive education and the supports they perceive to be necessary for their teachers and schools. Parents have also been asked to share what their expectations for their children in inclusive school settings (Garver-Pinhas & Pedhauzer Schmelkin, 1989; Jacobsen & Sawatsky, 1991).

Only very recently has the voice of students been added to the discussions of inclusive physical education. A special edition of the Journal of Teaching in Physical Education (1995, 14(4)), was dedicated to physical education through students' eyes and in students' voice. The purpose of the monograph was to describe and analyze what students think, feel, and know about various aspects of their physical education programs. The contributors to the special edition revisited the assumption that teachers know and understand the needs and interests of the students they teach.

Portman (1995), a contributor to the monograph, looked at the experience of low-skilled sixth grade students using the theoretical construct of learned helplessness. Teacher judgement and skills tests were used to identify 13 low-skilled students (11 girls and 2 boys) from four 6th-grade classes. Interviews and field observations revealed four themes, I like PE when I am successful, I can't because I can't, mostly nobody helps, and mostly everyone yells at me. Portman suggested that the 13 low-skilled students exhibited symptoms of learning helplessness and believed themselves to be fatalistically doomed to failure. The pattern of failure was attributed to lack of ability, and the students were largely unwilling to expend and sustain effort to learn skills.

Other contributors addressed specific aspects of physical education, such as student responses to formative grading in physical education, physical fitness testing and keeping score in children's games. In a study of responses to grading practices (Nugent & Faucette, 1995) two 6th-grade students, one classified as gifted by the education system and another as learning disabled, were interviewed. They also completed 2 written questionnaires. The students were initially selected for the study based on teacher referral. The teacher was asked to identify one female who was predicted to achieve a high mark in physical education and one who was predicted to achieve a low mark. Although these students were later classified as gifted and learning disabled based on performance on the Stanford-Binet and three tests of learning achievement respectively, their classifications were not known to the researchers at the time of the study. The analysis of the data revealed that both students experienced frustration and disappointment over their grades. The student who was gifted displayed creativity in her suggestions for how the grading process could be better implemented and the student who was learning disabled discussed her vulnerability to lower grades due to problematic behaviours.

In a further study, Hopple and Graham (1995) presented what children think, feel, and know about physical fitness testing, particularly the mile run which was administered each fall and spring. The participants were 52 Grade 4 and 5 students from two different schools. Analysis of the interview, written quiz, and teacher supplied physical education artifact data revealed three main themes - students' understanding, test dodging, and options for change. The authors indicated that most students did not understand why they were taking part in the mile run physical fitness test. Although the link to cardio-vascular fitness was demonstrated by the responses of some students, their understanding appeared to be incomplete.

Students who tended to perform poorly on the test commented that the mile-run test was "the" test to be avoided. Some of the methods used to avoid the test were faking illness or injury, staying away from school on test administration day, or producing a written note from home. Physical pain and discomfort were reasons cited for dodging the test. If provided the opportunity, some students would have changed the mile run to make it more fun. Fun was equated with easier (shorten the distance), not keeping track of the score (recording times), and adding equipment to make it more game like (jumping over cones, kicking a ball). Overall, the authors concluded that for many students of this study, the mile-run test was not a meaningful or positive experience, but rather a painful, negative one that was to be avoided.

In yet another area of physical education, the meaning of score keeping in children's games was investigated (Wessinger, 1994). The pervasiveness of games in our elementary curriculum and the controversy surrounding the potential outcomes of competition in children's play, led this author to seek an understanding of the meaning of score keeping from the children's perspective. Students from 2 fourth-grade classes were interviewed. For these students, scoring or helping the team to win contributed to a good feeling about physical education. Scoring against the odds, with finesse, or spectacularly was reported to set you apart from the others, which also contributed to good feelings about physical education. Scoring appeared to be valued for the public glory it bestowed on these students. The implications resulting from these students' experiences were that small teams (1-on-1, 2-on-2), which matched the participants' skills to the game challenges, would increase the opportunity for and potential ease of scoring.

In a further study, Carlson (1995) investigated the actions and feelings of students who have become alienated from physical education. In-depth phenomenological interviews with 2 junior high students, 4 teachers, a survey of 105 student in 6 different grade levels, and interviews with a further 6 students identified from the survey results, resulted in the construction of a model to help explain the alienation process associated with physical education. Extrinsic and intrinsic factors were advanced to explain why some students "hate gym" (p. 475). Factors contributing to alienation included a lack of personal importance and identification with physical education, feelings of lack of control brought on by competitiveness and "being on display," and a sense of isolation associated with perceptions of poor skill development. The students of this study responded to their adverse experiences in physical education by attempting to hide their displeasure from others, being spectators by withdrawing from participation and bench sitting, becoming wallflowers by participating minimally, faking illness or injury, or self-banishment through non-attendance.

In one of the few studies of physical education experiences for students with physical disabilities, Blinde and McCallister (1998) interviewed 20 students (17 boys and 3 girls) with an average age of 13 years. The disabilities represented were cerebral palsy, spina bifida, birth defects, head injury, paraplegia, and polysonic fibrous dysplasia. A content analysis of the interview data revealed that although some students expressed happiness or satisfaction with physical education, these comments were activity or class period specific. More typical responses were represented by the themes of limited participation and negative emotional responses. The authors concluded that students offer a unique vantage point from which to view the physical education environment and resulted in a number of teacher recommendations.

Students' expression of need and experience may aid in the sensitive selection and modification of activities. Teachers were encouraged to take advantage of program resources published in the area of adapted physical activity. It was further suggested that team activities may need to be de-emphasized in favor of a criterion referenced curriculum as outlined by Rizzo, Davis, and Toussaint (1994). Teachers were also encouraged to set aside their own fears and assumptions about the degree to which students with disabilities should be involved in physical education and to provide the same opportunities for all students to participate. Lastly, the social dynamics of the learning environment needs to be monitored so as to discourage ridicule, exclusion, or discrimination by classmates.

The perspective of persons with developmental disabilities has also been sought.

Persons with developmental disabilities have been interviewed to obtain information on their adjustment to community life as the facility-based response to persons with disabilities shifted to service and support based responses or paradigms (Polloway, Smith, Patton, & Smith, 1996). Quality of life studies have been conducted to obtain the values, views, and preferences of persons with developmental disabilities in regard to such areas as home, work, leisure, and relationships (Hoge & Dattilo, 1995; Neumayer, & Bleasdale, 1996; Wheeler, 1996).

It is only recently that interviewing has been promoted as a viable method for collecting research data about the lives of persons with developmental disabilities (Malik, Ashton-Shaeffer, & Kleiber, 1991). The use of interviews is not without its challenges however. Acquiescence, or the inclination to answer yes, regardless of the question asked, threatens the validity of the responses of persons with developmental disabilities (Heal & Sigelman, 1995; Matikka & Vesala, 1997; Sigelman, Budd, Spanhel, & Schoenrock, 1981).

Other aspects of verbal communication have also been raised. Speech defects may make recorded interviews difficult to transcribe. Also, a tendency for a higher incidence of hearing disorder in persons with developmental disabilities over the general population may also influence the ability to correctly hear the interviewer. The interpersonal dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee may also contribute to the degree in which active and full involvement of both parties is achieved (Atkinson, 1989). But perhaps most significantly, the question of the linguistic abilities of persons with developmental disabilities has been raised (Owens, 1989). How well can they understand words, concepts, and questions? A series of studies completed by Carol Sigelman (1981) and her associates at the Research and Training Center in Mental Retardation at Texas Tech University addresses this complex question. In reviewing the research to that time it was concluded that persons with mental retardation

> ...appear to be able to understand and use semantic information in much the same way as non-retarded persons of the same mental age do....Therefore, the semantic system of mentally retarded children develops normally, although they tend to lag behind in their rate of acquisition....Consequently, in developing interview

> questions for mentally retarded consumers with low mental ages, one should, to the extent possible, use very simple sentence constructions which draw on concrete and commonly used words (p. 2.16).

To overcome the tendency to discount the opinions and information provided by persons with developmental disabilities, techniques for improving their ability to talk for themselves have been sought. Drawings and pictures have been used to increase the reliability and validity of self-report, as well as posing questions in multiple and triangulated formats, e.g., open ended questions to compliment close-ended questions, and supplementing participant information with other data collection techniques (Sigelman & Budd, 1986; Wadsworth & Harper, 1991).

In a study by Dattilo, Hoge, and Malley (1996), 100 persons with mental retardation and their parents or caregivers were interviewed about their current and past recreational activities, the quality of their participation, and constraints to leisure participation. The researchers documented their actions to enhance the validity and reliability of the responses. The procedures they implemented included avoiding temporal and numerical concepts, including concrete visual cues, and using different types of questions. Systematic interviewer training was also undertaken.

In a study completed by Wyngaarden (1981) with 440 persons with developmental disabilities he concluded, "One of the most important findings of the study was that mentally retarded people can and are eager to provide complex and moving accounts of their experiences in returning to community life" (p. 113). He remarked that the decision to interview persons with developmental disabilities was guided by two assumptions. First persons with developmental disabilities are valid sources of information and second, for information about some aspects of their lives, they are the only appropriate source.

Given the paucity of research information on the experiences of students with physical disabilities and the growing recognition that persons with disabilities can be valid and reliable source of information about their own lives, the chosen focus of this dissertation is the experiences of students with physical disabilities in physical education.

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# Chapter Four

## Inclusive Physical Education from the Perspective of Students with Physical Disabilities[2]

Inclusive physical education compels teachers to embrace student diversity as an expected and valued attribute (Bunker, 1994). In many respects, however, perceived success in inclusive physical education has been synonymous with "fitting in" to the existing structure by either possessing minimal differences or by managing the reduction of functional ability (DePauw, 1997). Directly or indirectly, researchers have asked teachers, classmates, and administrators how students with disabilities have fit into existing programs (e.g., Block & Zeman, 1996; Garver-Pinhas & Pedhauzer Schmelkin, 1989; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; LaMaster, Gall, Kinchin, & Siedentop, 1998; Tripp, French, & Sherrill, 1995).

Conducting research in inclusive physical education *with* students with disabilities rather than *on* or *about* them will begin the process of dismantling the assumption of disability ownership and validate the need for supports based on student identified environmental constraints (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). Little research has been conducted on the experience of students with disabilities (Blinde & McCallister, 1998). What students think, feel, and know about their participation in physical education has received little attention conceptually or in the empirical research (Graham, 1995). Teachers and instructors continue to assume that their view of the world is the students' view of the world and that they understand and know the needs and interests of their students. Including the voice of students with disabilities in our research agendas will deepen our understanding of disability and assist us to identify barriers that are most meaningful to students (Reid, 1989).

### Theoretical Framework

The determinants of a positive learning environment for students with disabilities in physical education have received only cursory consideration. Environmental factors that afford students the opportunity to be meaningfully involved in the regular physical education program remain undisclosed. The goals and objectives for students with disabilities in physical education have been open to wide interpretation (Davis, 1989; Sherrill & Montelione, 1990) and the degree to which the program content is relevant and ecologically valid for students with physical disabilities is unclear (Davis & Burton, 1991).

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Gibson's ecological approach to perception (1977, 1979) provides a framework for exploring the mutuality of the student and the learning environment. His theory (1979) implies the complementarity of the person and the environment, referring to them as "an inseparable pair" (p. 8). What an environment affords us determines where and how we live. Gibson (1979) refers to our natural environmental and the way of life it affords as a "niche". In turn, an environment, or niche, reflects certain types of inhabitants. "The niche implies a certain kind of animal, and the animal implies a certain kind of niche" (Gibson, 1979, p. 128).

Gibson's theory of ecological perception posits that perception and action are mutually linked. To alter and take advantage of what the environment offers us, we must first perceive, value, and give meaning to its affording qualities. Coining the term *affordances*, Gibson (1979) stated: "The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill" (p. 127). Perception then, "is the process of becoming aware of environmental affordances" (Bouffard, Strean, & Davis, 1998, p. 256). For an affordance to be supportive it must be perceived and attended to by the person. Affordances must also be assessed relative to that person, taking into account the person's size, form, and capabilities (Gibson, 1979). What is an affordance to one person may not be an affordance for another. An affordance links the functional utility or adaptive value of objects or events to the capabilities of the person.

Gibson (1979) provided insights into six environmental affordances (a) the medium, (b) surfaces and their layout, (c) substances, (d) objects, (e) animals and persons, and (f) places. By way of example, air can be considered a medium. Being able to alter the medium of air by compressing and regulating its release affords breathing and hence life for those who have lost the ability to breathe on their own. This alteration similarly permits travel to places that would otherwise be inaccessible, such as that experienced by free-swimming scuba divers.

The affording qualities offered by surfaces and their layouts is illustrated by interactions with a ramp. A ramp affords ascent or descent to horizontal surfaces that are on different planes for persons who use wheelchairs. Each person will perceive and experience the qualities of the ramp differently, however. Successful negotiation of the ramp will occur only if the ramp is strong enough, at a low enough angle, and wide enough for the person using it. A ramp that is not of this nature affords the negative consequence of falling. Furthermore, the parameters of a safe and negotiable ramp for one person may be different from those for another.

Water, as a substance, has a surface but one that does not afford walking support for large creatures. Moving through water of sufficient depth, however, affords locomotion to people who cannot walk on the flat rigid surface afforded by the ground. Perceiving water as an aid to independent walking is experienced only when the body is sufficiently submerged in the water. Its buoyancy quality counteracts the effects of gravity on weakened muscles, affording increased balance and ease of movement

The affordances of objects are extremely numerous. The grasp-ability of an implement, for example, may enable participation in an activity previously perceived to be unattainable. Building up the grip of a badminton racquet may increase a person's ability to control the head of the racquet. The practice of modifying equipment that prevails in the field of adapted physical activity is grounded in the concept of affordances of objects.

"The richest and most elaborate affordances of the environment are provided by other...people" (Gibson, 1979, p. 135). Behaviour of a social nature relies upon perceiving what another person affords. Satisfying relationships are based on perceiving mutual affordances. Students, for example, afford teachers the opportunity to facilitate learning. Teachers, in turn, afford students an avenue by which to learn. Peers play a defining role in the experience of students with disabilities in physical education (Block, Oberweiser, & Bain, 1995; Tripp et al., 1995). Peers afford enhanced participation by sensitively judging the force and effort qualities needed to exchange a ball successfully in a partner activity. They can also detract from the experience by over helping and removing choice and opportunity for decision making.

Places afford concealment for hiding an object from others and for the hiding of oneself from others (Gibson, 1977). The places that we associate with physical education, however, do not afford concealment, but rather exposure. A public locker room with open showers does not afford privacy for those who desire it. Similarly, the gymnasium does not afford concealment of a disability. In summary, the affording roles of medium, substances, surfaces, objects, people, and places provide a framework for discussing the experience of students with physical disabilities within the environment of inclusive physical education.

## Purpose

The focus of this study was to add the voices of students with physical disabilities to that of teachers, parents, classmates, administrators, and researchers in the discussion of inclusive physical education by asking the question: What is the experience and meaning of inclusive physical education from the perspective of students with physical disabilities? *Experience*, within an ecological perception framework, is the composite of all of the interactions between perception and action that occur minute by minute. *Meaning* is assigned to our experience as we take note of them, impart memory to them, and assign them significance to our lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). The term *perspective* is used to refer to the interpretations and reflections that students with disabilities assign to their own experiences.

## Method

To address the experience and meaning of inclusive physical education, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was utilized. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a study of the interpretation of texts for the purpose of obtaining a common understanding of the meaning assigned to everyday experiences (Morse & Field, 1995; Packer, 1985). The underlying dynamics (themes) that account for an experience provide the central meaning that enables one to understand the substance or essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The appeal of hermeneutic phenomenology in educational research rests with the pedagogic reflections that are elicited by the kind of seeing, listening, and responding necessary to understand the realities of students (van Manen, 1986).

## Participants and Setting

Nine participants (6 males and 3 females) from Grades 5 and 6 and between 10 and 12 years of age, mean age of 11 years 1 month, participated in the study. A maximum variation purposeful sampling design was utilized (Patton, 1990). Maximum variation sampling is particularly useful for capturing central themes or principal outcomes that cut across diversity as is found in inclusive physical education settings (Dreher, 1994). As shown in Table 4-1, the participants had a range of physical disabilities typically found in the regular classroom (i.e., cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and amputation) (Sherrill, 1998). Although all of the participants used wheelchairs for participation in physical activity, the severity of the disabilities varied as 4 of the participants were classroom ambulators. Boys and girls participated in the study, and the participants attended different schools across three school divisions. Although the findings of qualitative research do not generalize in the traditional or nomothetic sense, the information can be illuminating to other groups and settings with similar student variations and constraints (Patton, 1990; Schofield, 1990).

The participants were attending a week long summer camp for children with physical disabilities (i.e., cognitive disabilities were not present) when the study took place. The camp, which was sponsored by two disability sport organizations was situated outside a larger urban area, drawing campers from a large cachement area. A camp registration fee was required of all campers, although the rates were subsidized by the sponsors. Letters outlining the nature of the study were sent to the 10 parents and care givers who had children between ages 10 and 12 years registered with the camp. There were approximately 40 children registered in the camp in total. The nine families who expressed interest in the study represented approximately 22% of the total number of children (40) in attendance at camp. To build rapport with the participants, the investigator spent time volunteering as a camp counselor for several days prior to and after data collection.

## Data Collection

The data collected pertained to school physical education, not the camp. Children were asked to remember and share their experiences in inclusive physical education classes during the past 1 or 2 years. The data were triangulated, that is, a combination of several data sources were used within the study to gain a broad view of the setting (Janesick, 1994; Morgan & Spanish, 1984). Information was collected through focus group interviews, participant drawings, and field notes.

Focus group interviews. The participants were divided into two small focus groups, one group of 10-year-old participants (n = 5) and one group of 11- and 12-year-old participants (n = 4). Small groupings provided ample opportunity for each participant to have input. The presence of similar aged participants also reduced the tendency to acquiesce in the authoritative presence of older participants or an adult (Lederman, 1990).

Focus groups are group interviews in which a small number of respondents, under the guidance of a moderator, talk about topics that are of importance to them (Morgan, 1998). Multi-staged or repeated focus groups were conducted to facilitate rapport building and cover a range of questions from easy to more advanced without taxing the limits of the participants' attention or patience (Greenbaum, 1998).

Each group met with the interviewer for 60 minutes on two occasions, within a 1-week period. The focus groups were audio and videotaped with the participants' permission. The videotaping was done as a back up to the audio-taping as well as to assist with voice identification for transcription purposes (Bertrand, Brown, & Ward, 1992). Each focus group session included an introduction, warm-up activity, drawing task, easy nonthreatening questions followed by more difficult questions, and a wrap up activity (Spradley, 1979).

Small focus groups were chosen over one-on-one interviews because group interaction can lead to more open discussions of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Kreuger, 1998). Participant to participant interactions also provide an opportunity for the participants to guide the discussion and present information important to them that may not be anticipated by the moderator (Bertrand et al., 1992). Group discussions can also generate the snowballing of one person's comment into a chain of additional comments, resulting in a wider data bank than individual interviews alone (Morgan, 1998).

Visual recordings. Working with children in interview settings poses unique challenges. Children need to be put at ease and encouraged to participate, made to understand that there are no right and wrong answers and that what they say is important, and helped to understand the ideas being put before them by the moderator (Greenbaum, 1988). Along with the use of sentence completion and imagination type interview questions, the participants were asked to draw a picture of what physical education meant to them, using markers, crayon, or pencil crayon. The drawings eased the participants into the interview, provided a stimulus for discussion (McDonald & Topper, 1988), and generated important information.

Field notes. At the end of each day of contact, the first researcher recorded reflections on the project as a whole, impressions about what was said that day, ideas for further probes, and preliminary thoughts about the themes emerging from the data. These field notes were written to facilitate the analysis so the investigators could conceptually return to the setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

### Method of Analysis

To identify common threads that extended throughout the data, we subjected verbatim transcripts to semiotic clustering analysis, defined as the search and interpretation of categories and linguistic structures found in the text (Feldman, 1995). Not only were the words considered, but following the semiotic linguistic tradition, the context of each response received attention (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994). To isolate the emerging thematic statements, we conducted a line-by-line analysis. This entailed reading the transcripts and field notes numerous times. Particularly revealing phrases were highlighted and coded with meaningful labels. The denotative meanings were compared with connotative meanings arising from examination of the content, context, and relationships among the entries. Phrases that were conceptually similar were gathered together into thematic statements. Thematic descriptions were further gleaned from the participants' drawings. The essential themes, or those that give fundamental meaning to the phenomenon, were then determined (Kreuger, 1998). Table 4-2 provides a summary of the analysis. Gibson's (1979) ecological perception and affordance theory was used to facilitate the interpretation of descriptive data after the analysis was complete. The study was not a test of his a priori conceptual framework.

The method used to analyze the participants' drawings was symbolic analysis (Ball

& Smith, 1992). Full appreciation of the visual representations was arrived at by first looking for symbols that represented the experience of inclusive physical education. The meanings of the symbols were then derived from the participants' descriptions of their work during the focus group discussions.

## Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research Findings

Prior to data collection, the first researcher used a bracketing exercise (i.e., a self-interview) to identify preconceptions about the participants' experiences in inclusive physical education (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). Answers to questions posed about what the investigator was thinking and already knew about the research topic were recorded on the computer and became part of the field notes. These preconceptions were referred to during the analysis to keep interpretation bias in check (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990). To further the trustworthiness of the findings, an audit trail was kept which recorded the process and decisions made by the investigators. This trail included the events, tasks, and sequence of the preentry, entry, data collection, analysis, trustworthiness, and closing phases of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse & Field, 1995).

During the focus group process, as well as after the analysis was completed, we completed a members' check (i.e., at the conclusion of each focus group interview, a brief summary of critical points was provided) and the participants were asked to confirm or correct the reconstruction of their ideas and experiences (Kreuger, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, 3 participants who were particularly articulate in their responses during the focus group discussions (1 from Group 1 and 2 from Group 2) met individually with the first investigator to review a draft of the analysis. Their valuable comments were incorporated into the final reporting of the findings.

## Results

The semiotic analysis resulted in the emergence of a number of themes that revealed a persistent dichotomy in the participants' memories of how they experienced physical education. There were 'good days' and there were 'bad days.' At one point in the focus group sessions, the participants were asked to ascribe a color to their physical education experiences. One participant said, "I think purple because, ah, purple is a nice color so sometimes you have nice days, but purple can also be a darker color so you have bad days." A second participant said, "Rainbow sometimes....Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad."

The two central ideas of good days and bad days were helpful in organizing and presenting the data. A visual summary of the themes, based on the semiotic analysis, is provided in Figure 4-1. Quotes were used to illustrate the themes and [illegible]xpress ideas more clearly than could be done by the investigators.

Bad Days

Three themes emerged from the data analysis under the central idea of bad days. Students described their experiences as unhappy when they were subjected to social isolation, were perceived as different due to their disability, or had active participation in class restricted.

Social isolation. A bad day in physical education was characterized as one in which the participants were rejected, neglected, or seen as objects of curiosity by their classmates. The socially isolating nature of disability took three forms.

Instances of rejection were characterized by overt actions such as yelling, name calling, and laughing. "Like if they go up to their cool friend or something or to a popular person and tell them that I suck or something at that sport....Or if they laugh, if they laugh." "I find that, when your friends and you're doing a sport, there's always one or two kids that are making fun of you."

> When you are participating in something, and like you are going fast down the runway and someone puts their foot in front of you on purpose and then you run over it and then you get yelled at by them and then the teacher yells at you cause it's like not your fault cause you can't stop in time...some of the time it makes you feel like you just want to leave the gym.

At other times the participants indicated they had little or no communication with peers, and they felt they were being ignored and overlooked. Lack of attention from classmates was expressed this way by one participant: "They [classmates] don't listen to me anyway. I say something and they ignore me."

Participants were aware that their bodies were sometimes perceived as objects of attention that further isolated them from their classmates. At these times participants perceived that classmates did not see them, but rather their bodies. The participants explained: "I don't like when there's a lot of people that you don't know, cause sometimes they always stare at you. I hate that, cause people from the different classes stare at you when you're doing different sports." "...before we went into the pool and ah, a lot of the time my bathing suit didn't cover the scar on my back and that was really embarrassing but it's like why I'm in a wheelchair, so..."

Competence questioned. The performance aspect of disability was accentuated within the social context of physical education for these participants. Disability has been defined as: "Any restriction or lack (resulting from impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal" (United Nations definition of disability as cited in Shogan, 1998, p. 273). The social comparison standard implicit in this definition was applied to the participants' ability to participate in physical education by their classmates. The participants' status in regard to disability/ability was accentuated by calling into question their performance competence within that environment.

Although the participants appeared to use self-appraisal to determine their ability to participate (e.g., "I can do this..."), their classmates tended to "normalize" participation in physical education by suggesting that there were standards of acceptable performance. Students with disabilities who were perceived to be incapable of meeting performance standards had their ability to participate questioned. Participant comments included:

"...like when they say uhm, you can't do this, you're disabled. And I say back, I can too do this, I'm not that disabled." "...a girl came up to me and she talks to me like I'm dumb or something. Like they act like you have a mental disability or something. And you know that and they know that, but they just act like that because you have a disability." "Sometimes some people think I'm kind of stupid."

Restricted participation. A bad day in physical education was also portrayed as one with limited participation. Participation was inhibited by a lack of support from teachers, a scarcity of engagement from classmates, constraints imposed by the instructional space, or all three. Lack of teacher support was not associated with overt actions that limited participation but with uncertainty about appropriate performance expectations and activity adaptations. Some of the comments portraying teachers were

"My teachers won't let me do anything." "He's like go pump up balls in the storage room. And they're playing volleyball and I'm like - grrrrr!" "I think sometimes they ask you if they want you to participate in sports, like if you want to stay back and do your work or something, like during gymnastics they always ask me and I always tell them NO! I want to be with the group." "...uhm baseball uhm, sometimes I can't get the ball like, I swing, and I'm slow so I need a tee and you can't get a tee in the big group." "I wish they had the same activities but adapted for our disability, like swimming, they adapt it..."

> Gymnastics was hard on me 'cause I just have to sit there and watch. You're in the gym and it's supposed to be your gym time, right? Well you're not allowed bouncing the ball or else it would distract them and make them fall off the bars or something....Adapt it for wheelchairs, like get someone to lift me down onto the mats and do rolls and stuff.

Classmates' prejudgement of skill level also hindered the participation of students with disabilities as they were overlooked during class activities. One participant recounted his experience as he described his drawing (see Figure 4-1): "When I was in Grade 4 a group of boys and girls didn't want me to play soccer, because they said, you can't play cause you can't play soccer very well." A participant described his drawing of soccer as follows: "I'm not playing, cause no one passes to me. They don't let me do anything I want to do. They won't let me be in the net or anything. That's the only thing I can do in soccer and they don't believe that I'm good. [Who's they, when you say they?] Kids in the class."

Physical barriers also contributed to restricted participation in physical education. However, access to indoor gymnasia areas was not a concern, because ramps were reportedly available in all of the facilities. In contrast, students reported exclusion from special events and performances because other areas were not accessible. One participant recalled: "Okay, we were going to do some line dancing on the stage for the whole school. Guess what, he [teacher] wouldn't let me do it....Well, they could have just lifted me upon the stage and wheeled my chair up. I got to practice, but I didn't get to perform. [How did you feel?] Horrible, just horrible."

Outdoor teaching areas also limited participation because accessing grassy areas and play structures was difficult. Not only was participation restricted but the students were physically apart from classmates because of their inability to get to the instructional areas. In one of the illustrations, a participant depicted herself and two classmates "fooling around" on the small plot of tarmac available outside the fire escape doors of the gym while the remainder of the class played soccer baseball in an adjacent field (see Figure 4-2). Physical isolation and lack of participation contributed further to feeling she was no longer part of the class by referring to "their physical education," in the following quotation:

> You know what really ticks me off about my classmates and their physical education, 'cuz I can only go on the tarmac right, and that's like I can only go on the cement part without someone pushing me. And they want to go to the park all the time and they want to go to the field and then they say, "oh, you stay here and you'll find something to do. Well, you sit there and you do nothing, right. And they don't really think about that.

Other participants commented: "I think they should make part of the playground wheelchair accessible." "Like maybe they should cut it [grass] for those who are like in wheelchairs." "This year I helped the librarian pack our books....Because our field needs, the grass needs to be cut and I can't push through it....I was really ticked off cause they had someone cutting some of the grass and I think they should have cut all the grass. It wouldn't have taken that much money."

## Good Days

As well as having bad days in physical education, the participants characterized many of their experiences as being very positive. Meaningful experiences promoted a feeling of belonging, the chance to share or partake in the benefits of the program, and the opportunity to participate skillfully with classmates.

Sense of belonging. A sense of belonging emerged from supportive interactions with classmates and teachers in the regular physical education program. Past involvement with "special" physical education classes was portrayed as boring and socially isolating. One participant said: "I like being with the class better....Cuz like well so you play better sports cause all of those other kids I was talking about, all they do is play bowling, and you get pretty sick of playing bowling." "...it makes you feel really good when you are with the group and you are doing stuff with them..."

In contrast to the earlier discussion of classmates' limiting participation, classmates also contributed to active involvement in physical education. A sense of belonging was reinforced when classmates provided physical support such as helping with equipment and providing encouragement. Companionship, or having someone willing to spend time with the participants, was also significant. "Like when you're doing relays they cheer you on cause you are doing good and it's hard." "Well, cause he agreed to help me and he was so nice to me...when I walk I get some people to help me with my canes and they were really fun too..." "I can't go through the gym equipment doors if it's too crowded...I'm kind of slow to get my ball and get out. They get it for me and that."

Share the benefits. The participants were able to clearly articulate the generally accepted goals of physical education. Fitness, skill development, knowledge acquisition, and positive social relationships were all identified as relevant and valid reasons to be involved in physical education. They recognized that by participating they were benefitting from the goals of the program which in turn contributed to their physical well being. Typical comments included: "It builds my strength." "To keep in shape." "To learn new things." "So you can learn new sports. This year we learned how to play volleyball and we're learning how to do serves and stuff so it was kind of fun." "How to have good sportsmanship."

The health benefits derived from physical activity were also highlighted as a reason for participating in physical education. Some participants believed that their disability predisposed them to illness and that it was important to build resistance against it. "I think that I participate a little, but I would like to participate most of the time in the class because it's better for our health, because we're disabled. Yah, because we get sick and if we participate in gym then we will stay healthy maybe." "So you don't get sick, so you stay healthy."

Skillful participation. The participants valued skillful participation for the intrinsic reward that accompanied self-efficacy as well as external acknowledgment. They enjoyed the opportunity to demonstrate skill proficiency to their classmates. One participant drew himself shooting for the basket from his wheelchair, his teammates in the distance, with one second left on the clock (see Figure 4-3). He described his drawing this way, "This picture is about me playing basketball and scoring the final basket of the game....I'm the guy at the front, the guy at the back is trying to catch me, the rest are far behind. I'm the only wheelchair person in my class, the whole school I mean. And some of my classmates are using wheelchairs too. They hardly know how to drive these."

The admiration the participants received from classmates contributed to a positive physical education experience. One participant recalled with enthusiasm an opportunity he had to demonstrate wheelchair basketball skills for his classmates skills, "and I knew so much!" Another participant recalled a swimming episode. "We had swimming lessons at our school...and I like it because a lot of people think I can't do sports and it's nice when they see me in with the Grade 6 kids swimming at their level, and ahead of them sometimes. I like them to see that I'm not in Yellow, that I'm in Life Saving I." Yet another commented, "What made me happy is that, ah, I kept up with the other kids in swimming and I was ahead of some of them..." "It's good when you can do a sport and you feel like you are special."

## Discussion

Gibson's (1977, 1979) concept of affordances provides a useful conceptual template for comprehending the significance of the experiences of the participants of this study. By posing the questions, "What affords a positive experience (good day) in physical education" and in turn, "what affords a negative experience (bad day)?" and listening carefully to the answers, we learned how these participants perceived their environments and attended to the affording qualities of people, substances, surfaces, places, objects, and medium.

As Gibson (1977, 1979) points out, the richest and most elaborate affordances within the environment are provided by interactions with people. People played a significant affording role in the negative experiences of students with physical disabilities. A preconception that people with disabilities had competence below the norm that was considered acceptable by classmates and teachers was instrumental in restricting participation. Students with physical disabilities were tolerated in activities but their participation was not deemed to be essential to the outcome. Hence, the participants reported that they were not passed to during games, were simply ignored, or were discouraged from assuming highly valued roles. Often they were assigned to the position of goalie.

Name calling, being the target of laughter, and simply being overlooked all together highlighted the socially isolating nature of disability. These 'put downs' are an outgrowth of the social value placed on homogeneity that all children experience at some time (Santrock, 1993). Not fitting in because of a physical disability can be exacerbated in the gym, however, as the ability to compensate or even disguise its functional impact on motor performance may not be possible. A tactful teacher knows when to intervene, when to hold back, when to redirect, and when to use a situation to educate. Sensitivity in teaching can strengthen what is good and unique about children and minimize that which can hurt students (Brown, 1992).

People also contributed in very positive ways to the experience of students with physical disabilities by affording a sense of belonging. Some classmates were supportive of accomplishments, facilitated participation by helping with equipment, and were willing partners. They reinforced a sense of belonging, group membership, and companionship. Not all classmates contributed to negative experiences, and similarly, not all classmates contributed to positive experiences. The support of even a very few classmates in physical education facilitated an expression of optimism about physical education.

The opportunity to participate meaningfully and competently contributed to positive experiences in physical education. The participants enthusiastically commented on their desire to "keep in shape," "learn new sports," and develop "good sportsmanship." It would appear that the goals of the regular physical education program are valued by these students with physical disabilities. An opportunity to demonstrate superiority over their classmates was especially highly valued, as was the case with swimming and wheelchair basketball for a number of the participants. The students' desire to be skillful performers bears out the position that motor skill acquisition should be an essential goal of physical education and primary to the experience of students with disabilities (Davis, 1989).

Water, as a substance, affords the potential for movement competence for students with physical disabilities that may not be possible elsewhere. Several participants commented on their proficiency in the water and how the swimming unit provided an opportunity to equal or excel the performance levels of their classmates as they "kept up" or were "ahead of them sometimes." The swimming unit made the physical education program meaningful and memorable for some of the participants. The buoyancy qualities of water can be liberating and a welcome reprieve from the constant constraints imposed by gravity.

The surfaces on which we conduct our physical education programs afforded students lost opportunities for participation. Physical accessibility to outdoor instructional environments was identified as a problem for students who could not negotiate the terrain in a timely manner or without undue fatigue. Although great gains have been made in joining surfaces together by ramping the interior of our buildings, outdoor areas and auxiliary instructional settings such as stages and playgrounds need to be more accessible. One participant indicated that a strategy of simply cutting the grass more frequently and over a wider area would have afforded her the opportunity to participate. Having access to the areas where the program is being conducted was fundamental to a positive experience in physical education. Benevolent facility usage and continued vigilance to physical accessibility is needed.

A metaphor for the physical education program is the gymnasium. It is the place we lay claim to and regard as our "classroom". For the participants of this study, the gymnasium afforded heightened awareness of their bodies. They could not, for example, minimize the conspicuousness of their wheelchair as is possible when working at a desk or table in the classroom. Due to its stark openness, the gymnasium exposes its inhabitants to the full view of others. For the participants of this study, being observed or "stared at" reminded them that their bodies were different from that of their classmates. This reminder contributed to feelings of self-consciousness and transpired into feelings of ambivalence about physical education in some circumstances. The pool setting was another place that exposed students to the observation of others as clothing typical of the school day was replaced by bathing suits.

The experience of these students should compel us to ensure privacy in locker room and pool change areas and afford students with disabilities the dignity of nondisclosure if they so choose. The barrenness of the gymnasium cannot be modified. However, by recognizing the inherent negativeness this open space can afford students with disabilities, we become more sensitive to the experience of students and can bring tact to our teaching.

The inclusive physical program as a whole can be conceptualized as a "niche"with its own set of affordances. The participants indicated that they preferred being with classmates in the regular program over participating in a segregated or special program. The segregated programs were reported to have limited or tiresome program offerings. Inclusive physical education, in contrast, afforded these participants the opportunity to benefit from the goals and diversity of activities of the regular program. Even at this relatively young age, the health benefits of physical activity toward the alleviation of illnesses were understood. Physical education was meaningful to these participants because of the physical well being they were afforded through participation in the program.

Modifying equipment can make motor tasks easier or more difficult and afford enhanced participation. Changes can be made to such factors as the size, weight, length, speed, and trajectory of objects. Interestingly, the participants of this study did not identify the affording qualities of objects in their experiences in physical education. This raises the question of whether students with physical disabilities perceive, attend to, or actively seek out affordances that are to their advantage in physical education. Would introducing the concept of affordances to the students contribute to their being more active decision makers and requesters of choice in their participation? This question is worthy of further investigation as we seek to empower students to be active in the learning process and initiators of strategies that will guide their own learning. Although there has been an increasing interest in self-determination in special education (Sands & Wehmeyer, 1996; Wehmeyer, 1992) we really do not know if inclusive physical educational settings promote expressions of preference, student choice, input into goal setting, strategies for monitoring personal progress, and personal responsibility for outcomes. Work recently completed on ecological task analysis (Burton & Davis, 1996; Davis & Burton, 1991;

Davis & van Emmerik, 1995) provides a timely and needed instructional model that systematically addresses the need for participant choice, flexibility in movement form, and other task variables such as equipment and space in the completion of the task outcome.

The medium of air was not an influential factor in the reporting of good or bad days for these participants. The affording qualities of air certainly contributed to their participation, in fact made it possible, as air is essential for respiration. Whereas certain features of air (e.g., temperature, humidity) can impact the degree of comfort experienced while participating in physical activity, there was no reporting of such an affordance. Although air also affords the perception of sound through air transmitted vibrations, and visual perception when it is illuminated and free of fog, there was no reported awareness of these affording qualities on participation in physical education. Had access to air been diminished through a lung disease process, or communication interrupted due to sound wave disruption, or darkness, the affording qualities of air may have been perceived and given participant attention.

The present study provided insights into what contributes to positive and less than positive experiences for students with physical disabilities in physical education and provides cause for reflection on other inclusive physical education programs. The voices of students conceptualized within the theoretical framework of affordances (Gibson, 1977, 1979) has reinforced the need to be pedagogically sensitive to individual students. By listening carefully to students, will we come to see disability as a natural expression of diversity and come to understand that which is setting us apart from one another?

Table 4-1 Description of Participants

| Age in years | Disability | Girl/Boy | Ambulatory |
|---|---|---|---|
| Group One | | | |
| 12 | spina bifida | girl | no |
| 12 | spina bifida | boy | no |
| 12 | cerebral palsy | boy | yes |
| 11 | double above knee amputation | girl | no |
| Group Two | | | |
| 10 | cerebral palsy | girl | yes |
| 10 | spina bifida | boy | no |
| 10 | cerebral palsy | boy | yes |
| 10 | cerebral palsy and hard of hearing | boy | yes |
| 10 | spina bifida | boy | no |

[a] Mean age across all 9 students was 11 years 1 month.

Table 4-2 Summary of the Semiotic Clustering Analysis

| Denotative Meaning | Connotative Meaning | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| They laugh at me<br>They ignore me<br>They stare at my body | Rejection<br>Neglect<br>Body object of curiosity | Social isolation |
| They think I can't do it<br>They think I'm dumb | Others judge my ability | Question competence |
| Teachers don't let me<br>Classmates don't pass to me<br>I can only go on the cement | Lack of support<br>Constraints of space | Restricted participation |
| Feel good when with the group<br>Teacher says I'm doing a good job<br>They [peers] cheer you on | Being with the class<br>Encouragement and acknowledgment | Sense of belonging |
| Reasons for participation:<br>- build up my strength<br>- learn new things<br>- become faster<br>- to stay healthy<br>- sportsmanship<br>- makes our brain work more<br>- cause it's a lot of fun | Physical education valued<br>Essential for physical well being | Acquire the benefits |
| I like them to see that I'm good | Skill competence<br>Self-efficacy | Skillful participation |

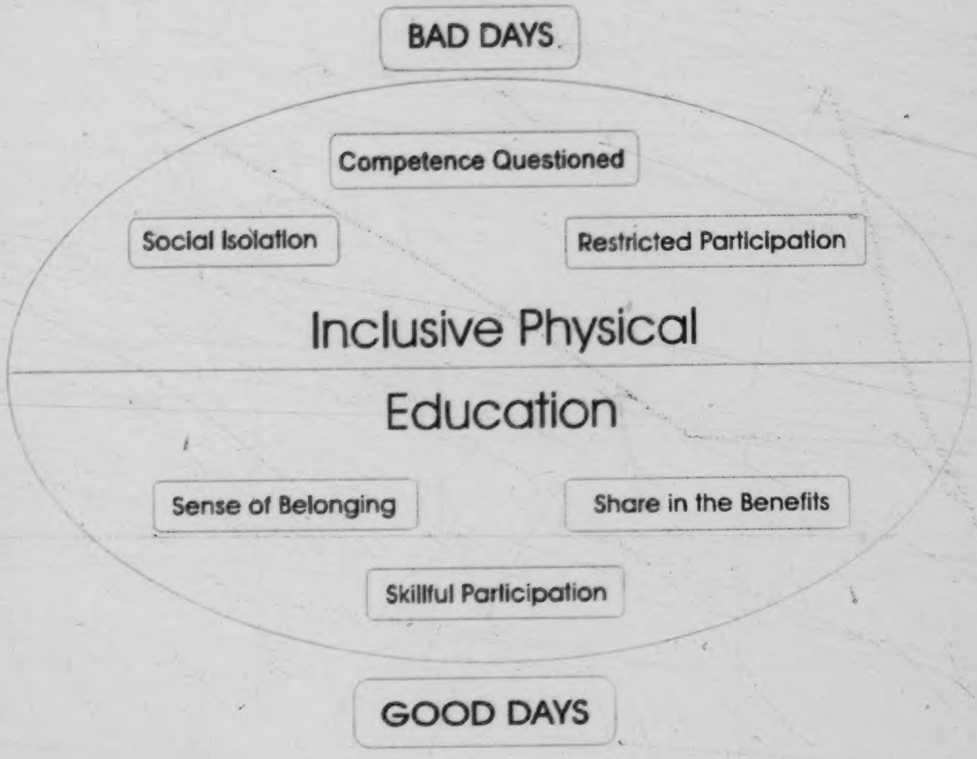

BAD DAYS
Competence Questioned
Social Isolation
Restricted Participation
Inclusive Physical Education
Sense of Belonging
Share in the Benefits
Skillful Participation
GOOD DAYS

Figure 4-1 Thematic summary of inclusive physical education from the perspective of students with physical disabilities.

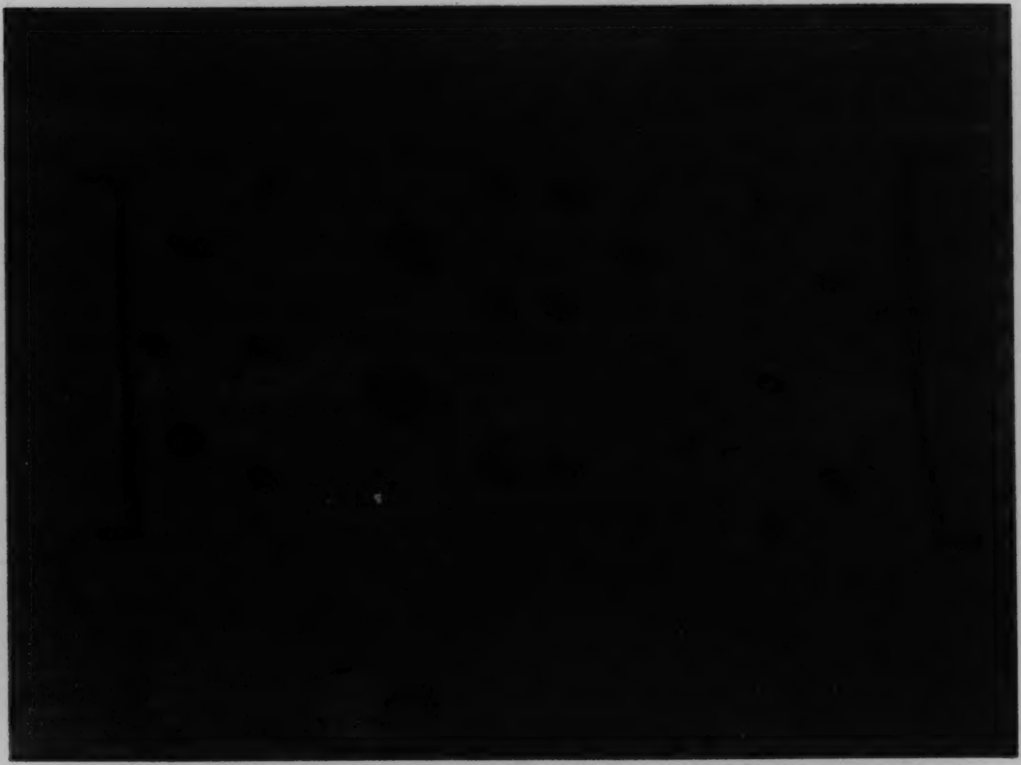


Figure 4-2 A 12 year old male participant's drawing depicting restricted participation in physical education.

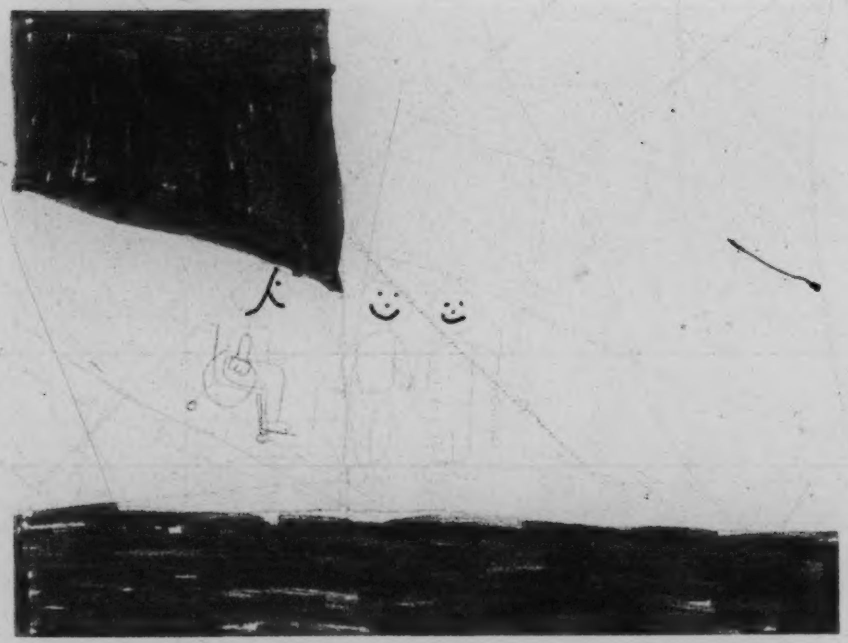
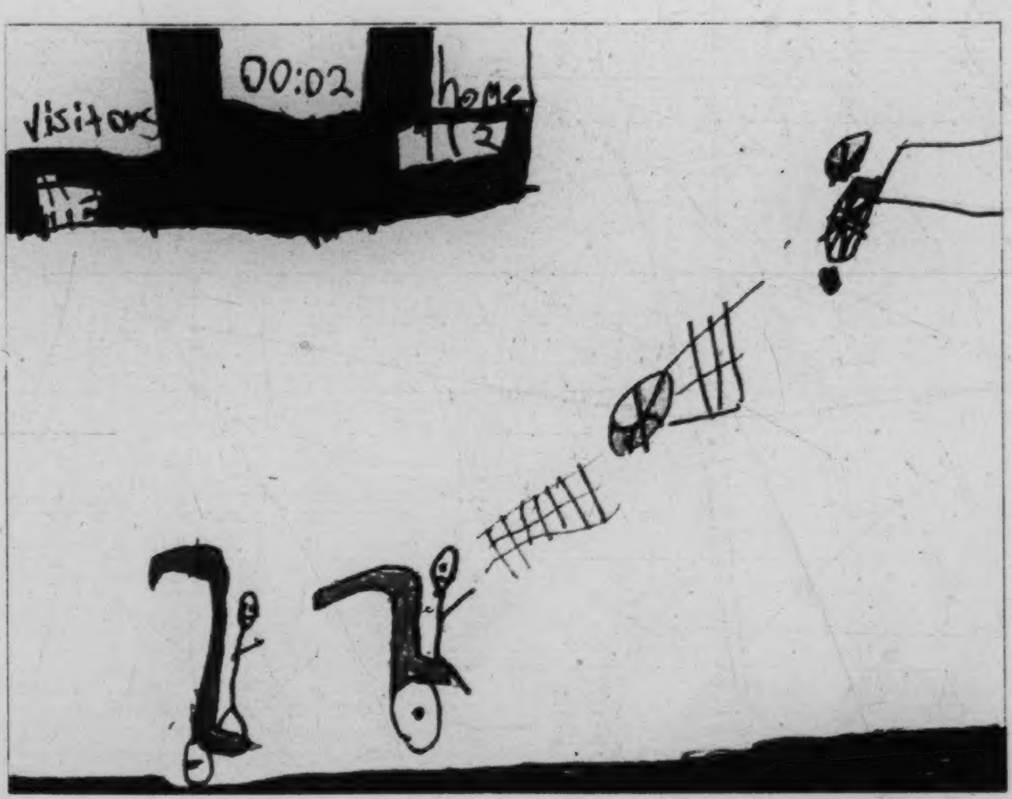


Figure 4-3 A 12 year old female participant's drawing depicting restricted participation during soccer and baseball.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visitors
home
112

Figure 4-4 A 10 year old male participant's drawing depicting skillful participation in physical education.

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## Chapter Five

## The Role of Classmates in the Experience of Students with Physical Disabilities in Physical Education[3]

> "It's nice that I get to tell what my physical education is like because it wouldn't be the same to you as it would be to me, because I might see things differently, in a bigger way or in a smaller way."
>
> Megan, 13 years old

Inclusive classrooms, or those which assist students with disabilities to achieve curriculum objectives within the regular classroom, necessarily rely on support networks to meet diverse student needs. The most accessible and sustainable networks are those that encourage ongoing and supportive student-to-student relationships, such as peer tutors, buddy systems, circle of friends, and cooperative learning (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). A vast amount of emphasis has been placed on helping relationships, such as peer tutoring, for students with disabilities. Peer tutoring (i.e., a system of instruction where pairs of students help one another and learn by their teaching) traditionally occurs by direct instruction during structured time blocks, focusing on specific curricular content. Tutoring may also occur incidentally and in a more spontaneous instructional environment. In both instances, a more knowledgeable "expert" generally guides the learner toward the acquisition of the relevant behaviour (Jenkins & Jenkins, 1985; Sherrill, Heikinaro-Johansson, & Slinger, 1994; Wehman, 1997)[4].

Peer tutoring relationships with students with disabilities provide unique opportunities to individualize programs, increase engaged instruction time, foster interdependence, promote social goals, decrease paraprofessional costs, and develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities (Block & Krebs, 1992; Block, Oberweiser, & Bain 1995; Cohen, Kulik & Kulik, 1982; Friend, Bursuck, & Hutchinson, 1998; Gartner & Lipsky, 1990; Hartup, 1983; Nadler, Fisher, & Streufert, 1976; Pugach & Johnson, 1990). The employment of peer tutors with students with developmental disabilities in physical activity settings has been positive. Peer tutors have been effective in assisting participants to improve their motor performance (Houston-Wilson, Dunn, Vander Mars, & McCubbin, 1997; Long, Irmer, Burkett, Glassennapp, & Odenkirk, 1980), fitness levels (Halle, Gabler-Halle, & Bembren, 1989) and time on task (Webster, 1987).

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[4] A distinction is being made between peer tutoring and impulsive help which is offered as an immediate response to another person's need, such as would be observed in classrooms when the peer closest to a students responds to a perceived need (Brickman, Kidder, Coates, Rabinovitz, Cohn, & Karuza, 1983).

Research has expanded our understanding of content areas appropriate for peer tutoring, the age of the tutor and tutee, size of instructional units, principles of reinforcement, and tutor training (Friend et al., 1998). However, many helping interactions, including peer tutoring, have come into wide use without adequate applied research on recipients' responses to being helped (Fisher, 1983). The meritorious quality often ascribed to the act of helping overlooks the dynamic nature of relationships and may have impeded the investigation of recipients' reaction to aid. This assumption, coupled with the necessity of support systems for inclusive classrooms, helps explain the paucity of research involving children with disabilities (Eisenberg, 1983; McNaughton, 1991; Nadler, 1983).

Several theoretical frameworks have been applied to the conceptualization of reaction to aid: equity theory, reactance theory, attribution theory, and threat-to-self-esteem model[5]. The threat to self-esteem model has been put forward as the most parsimonious and comprehensive account of the phenomenon, and is purported to incorporate the other theoretical perspectives of equity, reactance, and attribution (Nadler & Fisher, 1986). It also appears to be the most promising for examining the developmental course of children's reaction to aid (Eisenberg, 1983). It is this model that will be used to facilitate the interpretation of the data of this study.

Self-esteem is concerned with judgements of self-worth stemming from self-evaluations (Bandura, 1996). The degree to which other people accept and include versus reject and exclude us is vital to our psychological well being. The construct of self-esteem is an indicator that permits us to monitor others' reactions to us. When we detect real or potential rejection, we react with negative affect and respond to restore our standing in others' eyes. State self-esteem, or transient feelings about oneself, fluctuate as a function of the immediate situation. It involves how people feel about themselves. Trait self-esteem reflects the cumulative effects of perceived inclusion and exclusion over time (Leary, Schreindorfer, & Haupt, 1995).

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[5] For in-depth reviews of these four conceptualizations see Fisher, Nadler, &Whitcher-Algana, 1982, 1983; and Nadler & Fisher, 1986.

Reactions to receiving help are influenced by broadly socialized values of Western culture. The need to demonstrate independence and self-reliance is a coveted value. When help is perceived to be compensating for a lack of ability to care for one's needs or develop a means to contribute to society, negative 'self' messages can result. Being treated fairly by others is also valued, and support that exploits, or otherwise removes the element of fairness from the exchange, can be experienced negatively. As members of Western society, we are likewise socialized to believe we should maintain fair relations with others, striving to maintain equity in any social exchange, often by engaging in helping behaviours (Fisher, Nadler, & Whitcher-Alagna, 1982).

The threat to self-esteem model suggests that receiving help is a mixed blessing. The way help is given, the characteristics of the person who is giving it, and its context infuse a variety of affective and evaluative meanings, enhancing or dampening the instrumental impact of the help. These situational conditions provide contextual meaning, rendering help as "self-threatening" or "self-supporting" (Nadler & Fisher, 1986). When the situational conditions of help imply inferiority and conflict with the values of self-reliance and independence, negative self-perceptions lead to a threatening evaluation of help. Help may also lead to favourable self-perceptions and be supportive if it communicates donor caring, concern and provides instrumental benefits, i.e., the help is appropriate, accurate, and supportive (DePaulo, Brown, & Greenberg, 1983; Fisher et al., 1983; Nadler et al., 1976).

The threat to self-esteem model predicts that help that is predominantly supportive elicits a cluster of positive/non-defensive responses (e.g., favorable self and other perceptions). Self-threatening aid elicits negative/defensive responses (unfavourable self and other perceptions). In terms of behavioural responses however, both self-supporting and self-threatening aid, can provide motivation to end a dependency relationship. The moderating influence of the recipient's level of perceived control impacts the long term effectiveness of help in promoting independence and self-reliance. Self-threatening support then, can elicit two clusters of recipient responses depending upon whether or not the recipient has perceived control over subsequent outcomes. An appraisal of the perceived degree of control is determined by situational conditions and beliefs in one's ability to end dependency through the investment of labour. Recipients may conclude that the need for support was caused by internal-dispositional factors (e.g., personal inadequacy) or external-situational factors (e.g., task difficulty).

Controllable self-threat is experienced when threatening help is coupled with high expectation for control over future outcomes. Uncontrollable self-threat is experienced when help is coupled with low expectations of control over future events. Controllable self-threat can evoke short-term psychological distress (negative affect and unfavourable self and other evaluations), yet yield a self-help behavioural response (Nadler & Fisher, 1986). Uncontrollable self-threat attributes can lead to similar negative reactions and yet promote continued reliance on external help (Nadler & Fisher, 1986). The irony of social interaction is that it can reduce the actual and the perceived capability of its recipients and foster a state of helplessness (Coates, Renzaglia, & Embree, 1983).

## A Developmental Perspective

Young children seem to be less adept than older children in using information that can lead to negative self-evaluations in social settings. In a study completed by Tarowski, Holden, and Prinz, (1985) children between the ages of 6 and 8 years were asked to provide verbal responses to structured questions designed to obtain evaluations of their peer relations. Parents were also asked to rate their children's peer relations using the same questions. The children did not share the same perspective as adults, reinforcing child self-perception as an important dimension in applied research. The children rated themselves as having fewer problems with peer relations than was reported by their parents. The authors concluded that the divergence between child perspective and adult perspective occurred around the subjective aspects of feelings of alienation, satisfaction, and social awareness. Baldwin and Baldwin (1970) also noted divergence between the way children and adults interpreted social situations. In their study of the development of children's concepts of kindness, children in Grades 2, 4, 6, and 8 were presented with pairs of stories depicting various motivations for kindness (e.g., returning favors, trading). By 2nd grade children understood intentionality and the role of self-interest. At some age levels it was noted, however, that the children judged a situation opposite to that of adults and gave consistent, clearly articulated reasons for their position. The information would suggest that there is a developmental component to reactions to aid and that children do not interpret situational variables as adults do.

Eisenberg (1983) suggests that young children attend to the outcomes of the process of aid much more than they do the situations embedded in the aid when compared to adults. Children may not interpret or be influenced by such contextual variables as the anonymity of the recipient, whether or not aid is expected, the opportunity to reciprocate, and whether the need for assistance was attributed to situational (external) or personal (internal) causes. Young children, 7 or 8 years of age, infrequently respond negatively to aid. The subtle implications of receiving aid should be increasingly processed with age, however. Children in middle childhood become more skilled at discerning the implication of help-receiving to their own state self-esteem. Around mid-elementary school, and progressively thereafter, children become more capable of making inferences regarding motives and begin to respond negatively, as do adults, to aid that is not voluntary and is done for non-altruistic motives (Eisenberg, 1983). She also states that prosocial behaviour that provides psychological support should become valued with age. It is unclear at what age this occurs. She reports further that investigation into these hypotheses is badly needed.

According to the limited data on adolescents, they respond to aid in ways similar to that of adults. Adolescents internalize, more strongly than do children, norms and interpersonal expectations related to reciprocity and equity between individuals. They appear to react positively to help that is unexpected and can be reciprocated (DePaulo, 1978; Eisenberg, 1983). Adolescents are also more likely to seek help from a stranger (i.e., their identity remains anonymous), and if the need for help has arisen from external or situational factors (Eisenberg, 1983).

## Gender Differences

The results of a study by Ladd and Oden (1971), which addressed children's ideas about helpful behaviour in Grade 3 and Grade 5, found that the helpful strategies identified by boys and girls were very similar for both groups. They concluded that there was a high degree of consensus among the groups as to the types of responses considered helpful. This consensus was further interpreted to suggest that there was a shared knowledge of peer norms regarding appropriate ways to help peers in specific social situations. Similarly, Baldwin and Baldwin (1970) found there were no differences in boys' or girls' ability to judge kindness in interpersonal relationships.

Inconsistencies have been reported in the research literature related to the gender of the recipient of help, however Eisenberg (1983) reported that preschool boys were more likely than girls to respond positively, rather than passively, to solicited prosocial behaviour. In contrast, she cites two other studies (Northman, 1978; DePaulo, 1978) that found girls were more likely to say they would be comfortable receiving help. Methodological differences in the studies make it difficult to interpret the differences that were found. "It is clear that more research regarding the relation between sex of the recipient and children's reaction to aid is merited" (Eisenberg, 1983, p. 205). However, she cautions, even if consistent gender differences in reaction to aid are noted, interpretation must be made judiciously. Females' more positive responses to aid may be a reflection of qualitative differences in the aid that is received by males and females.

Research on children's reactions to aid is extremely sparse, yet has important implications for understanding and facilitating helping relationships. When students with physical disabilities talk about physical education, they frequently mention their interactions with classmates. The degree to which classmates isolate or involve others in their activities, ridicule or acknowledge proficiency, and limit or facilitate active involvement can significantly impact students' experiences in physical education (Dyson, 1995; Goodwin & Watkinson, 1999; Portman, 1995; Walling & Martinek, 1995). A descriptive study steeped in the socio-cultural context of peer interactions in physical education is needed to determine the role of classmates in physical education.

Research addressing recipients with disabilities is sparse. A number of studies were undertaken post WW II to better understand the expectations, experiences, and feelings of injured men who had returned home (Dembo, Ladieu Leviton, & Wright, 1956). A study carried out with servicemen and veterans with amputations sought to determine the meaning of help for injured veterans (Ladieu, Hanfmann, & Dembo, 1947). The themes that emerged from the reports of 113 men fell into three main categories. Positive evaluations of help resulted from help that was focused on situational demands and was offered only when necessary. Help that maintained equality, expedited matters for the helpee, and was provided as a gesture of politeness or good-will was also welcomed. Help that implied pity, precluded independence, pointed out the disability, interfered with learning or promoted loss of self-respect through being spoiled or babied, was rejected. Veterans with disabilities resented the elements of inferiority and inability that were inherent in receiving help. When the help did not enlarge the "space of free movement" or promote personal goals, the help was resented, and the helper viewed as incompetent and interfering.

Emanating from this study were four recommendations for helping behaviour: ascertain the presence of a need or of a desire for help; don't help before obtaining the consent of the person; don't make a fuss or help for purposes of self-satisfaction; and do not persist in offering assistance if the help has been declined. The findings revealed that the same person may approve and disapprove of help, depending on the conditions of its offering, and its ascribed meaning. Alger and Rusk (1955) further reported that, to some persons with disabilities, accepting help from others to achieve what they could not do alone, was an admission of inferiority and weakness.

For persons with disabilities, help may be so overwhelming in its effect, that it can reduce the control that recipients have over their own lives (Ladieu et al., 1947; Taylor, 1979). It can undermine the acquisition of new skills or the application and maintenance of previously acquired skills (Coates, et al., 1983). Richardson (1971) suggested the development of a social relationship with a person with a disability is further complicated by the uncertainty of knowing to what extent the disability is primary or secondary to the perceived state of need. Ambiguity and uncertainty immediately arises as to whether help is needed or wanted, and what form it should take. With respect to children, Ladd and Oden (1979) suggest that peers of children with disabilities have no norms to guide the appropriateness of their helping behaviours outside of their intrinsic feelings of "fairness" (Brickman, Kidder, Coates, Rabinovitz, Cohn, & Karuza, 1983).

## Purpose

The purpose of the study is to describe the meaning of everyday experiences with classmates by students with physical disabilities in physical education. Central to this question are: descriptions of the everyday interactions students with physical disabilities experience with classmates in physical education; how they react to these interactions; the meanings that are ascribed to their experiences; and whether the experiences differ across age levels.

## Method

A descriptive, hermeneutic phenomenological study best lent itself to the examination of everyday peer relationships in physical education. Phenomenology offers a descriptive, reflective, interpretive, and engaged mode of inquiry that seeks to understand and describe the essence of day to day experiences (van Manen, 1994). Hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of the interpretation of texts for the purpose of obtaining a common understanding of the *meaning* assigned to these everyday experiences (Morse & Field, 1995; Packer, 1985; van Manen, 1994). The underlying structures (themes) that emerge from the descriptions of everyday practices enable one to understand experiences and thereby find commonalities in meanings (Moustakas, 1994).

### Participants

A maximum variation strategy was used in the identification of the participants (Patton, 1990). Information rich cases, representing 12 children of numerous physical disabilities and ages, were brought together to discuss interactions with classmates in physical education. The study was completed in two parts. In Part I, 3 participants from a recently completed study on the experience of students with physical disabilities in physical education (Goodwin & Watkinson, 1999), participated in a series of one-on-one interviews (see Table 5-1). The participants were of late elementary school age (mean age of 11 years 9 months). They provided insight into peer interactions as well as facilitated the development of the interview guide for use with the younger participants in Part II of the study.

In Part II, three focus groups, comprised of 4 students of early (mean age of 7 years 6 months), 2 students of middle (mean age of 9 years 2 months), and 3 students of late (mean age of 12 years 0 months) elementary school age school age brought a developmental perspective to the study (see Table 5-1). Spina bifida and cerebral palsy were the two disability classifications represented.

The participants were recruited through community physical activity programs for children with disabilities. The coordinators of the programs contacted registered families and provided information about the study. Families indicating interest were subsequently contacted by the investigator.

Data Collection

The data were triangulated, that is, a combination of several data sources were used (Morgan & Spanish, 1984; Janesick, 1994). To gain a broad view of the setting, information was collected in the forms of interviews, visual documentation, and field notes.

Interviews. Participants in Part I completed two 1 hour semi-structured one-on-one interviews (Greenbaum, 1988; Spradley, 1979; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). The interviews were audio-taped in the participants' homes and transcribed verbatim.

Participants in Part II completed two focus group interviews. The focus groups, as well as yielding a substantial amount of material in a short time, provided anonymity to the participants thereby fostering open discussions of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (Lederman, 1990). The child to child interactions were also useful for stimulating discussion in areas most relevant to the participants, and not only the interviewer (Morgan, 1998; Siegert, 1986). The focus group sessions were scheduled in accordance with program participation times.

Visual Documentation. Visual materials were generated by the participants to augment the textual descriptions (Ball & Smith, 1992; Wagner, 1979b). Each of the three participants in Part I were provided with 2 one-time use cameras and encouraged to take photographs of images that represented their relationship with classmates in physical education. Participant-produced photographs were selected over researcher-produced images to remove researcher bias from the captured images (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Wagner, 1979a; Walker, 1993). The participants were encouraged to be creative in their use of the camera. Images of things, places, classmates, groups, individuals, staged, or spontaneous action shots were all encouraged. The participants took photographs themselves, but also asked teachers and other students to capture images. The participants explained the significance of each image to the researcher during the audio-taped discussion.

The participants in Part II of the study generated drawings of their experiences with classmates in physical education. Completing the drawings and describing their content facilitated rapport development and provided a stimulus for discussion (Greenbaum,1988; McDonald & Topper,1988; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub,1996). The drawings also provided a way for participants to symbolically express their thoughts and feelings about relating to others (Di Leo, 1983; Klepsch, & Logie,1982; Musham & Trettin,1999).

Field Notes. At the end of each session a personal log was kept, recording reflections on what was said that day, ideas for further probing on subsequent days, and preliminary thoughts about themes emerging from the data. These notes permitted the investigator to conceptually return to the setting during the analysis of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Jackson, 1990).

## Method of Analysis

The structures of the experience, or phenomenological themes embodied in the participants' words, were generated through a line-by-line semiotic clustering analysis of the verbatim transcripts (Feldman 1995). Following the semiotic linguistic tradition, not only were the words considered, but the context that triggered the response received attention (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994). The transcripts and field notes were read over in entirety. Essential or particularly revealing phrases were highlighted and coded with meaningful labels. Those that were conceptually similar were gathered together into thematic statements (Kreuger, 1998; van Manen, 1994). Thematic descriptions of the symbolic meaning of the visual representations were derived from the descriptions provided by the participants during the interviews (Ball & Smith, 1992), and the final themes were determined.

## Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research Findings

Trustworthiness can be said to consist of four components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The credibility of this study rests, in part, with methodological and data triangulation. Numerous age groups participated in the study and multiple sources of information were used (i.e., interviews, visual artifacts, and field notes). Further, the investigator of the study had extensive experience working with children with disabilities in schools. In addition, informal member checks (i.e., a summary of the key points were presented to the participants for reaction) were completed at the end of each interview session (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

The information may be illuminating to other groups and settings with common participant variations or shared constraints. The transferability lies with the "fittingness" of the situation studied to one of interest (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schofield, 1990). As participants from different schools, and of various school age, were asked to speak of their experiences, comparability was realized in that the population and curriculum area studied were typical of inclusive education settings.

Dependability of the results was enhanced in the study by acknowledging the influence of preconceived thoughts, judgements, and biases on trustworthiness. A heightened awareness of preconceived ideas can enhance our ability to discern meaning from every day events (Moustakas, 1994; Denzin, 1994). To reduce the influence of the investigator's prejudgements a bracketing exercise was undertaken in the following way: a reflective self-interview was completed and documented on a computer file prior to data collection. It was referred to during data collection and analysis (Patton, 1990).

The confirmability of the study lies with a detailed reporting of the method used in the investigation. An audit trail was kept that recorded the process and decisions made during the investigation. Recorded were such events as field entry information, data collection and analysis decisions, and field closing actions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse

& Field, 1995).

## Results

In any supportive relationship, there is a person who bestows support and a person upon whom the support is bestowed. A difference in the meaning of the relationship between, in this case, the participants and classmates, was evident and varied by age. Participants judged peer support to be both positive and negative, depending upon the circumstances. Reactions to helping exchanges ranged from great appreciation ("someone is always there to help me") to rejection or disapproval ("it makes me feel sort of useless"). Conceptualizing positive peer interactions as self-supportive and negative peer interactions as self-threatening (Nadler & Fisher, 1986) facilitated the organization of the data. The themes that emerged reinforced the contextual significance of peer interactions and the complexity of helping relationships.

Self-supporting themes reflected peer interactions that were instrumental, caring, and consensual. Self-threatening themes were ones that reflected a loss of independence, a threat to self-image, help that was reckless, or in some cases interfering. Tables 5-2 and 5-3 outline the themes that emerged from the data condensing. A visual summary of the themes across age groups is provided in Figure 5-1. To understand the context and the meanings of the participants' experiential accounts, phenomenological descriptions of the themes are provided.

There was an increasing sophistication and detail noted in the stories explaining classmate support across the age groups. Although the younger children may have used fewer descriptors in their narratives than their older counter parts, their message was no less clear. For example, the disposition of classmates toward their wheelchairs being pushed was described by the younger participants in very global terms ("...he always helped me, even when I say, no, you don't have to help me"). The middle elementary school participants' verbal articulations were more descriptive ("Just stop pushing me around....I don't like being pushed around"), the late elementary school participants were most graphic in the portrayal of their experiences ("...don't use my wheelchair as a way to get me out of the way, you ask me!").

Self-Supporting Peer Interactions

Help that was directly relevant to the solution of a problem and met the recipient's expectations for support was construed as beneficial. Irrespective of participant age, classmates were perceived to be supportive when their help had instrumental qualities (i.e., facilitated active participation), they demonstrated positive regard or caring for the participants, or when their support was perceived to be emotionally supportive (see Table 5-2).

Instrumental Support. Across all three age groups, instrumental support was characterized by assistance with equipment, mobility, and participation. Support of this type was generally seen to be functional in nature, supporting active involvement in program activities. Help with equipment entailed support to reach, retrieve, or return small equipment.

| | |
|---|---|
| Age 7: | "They'll get it for us." "They help me put things away." |
| Age 9: | "They will pick it up for you and give it back to you." |
| Age 11: | "They see that I can't pick it [ball] up because I try to pick it up and when they see I can't reach it or get into that tight corner, or they go on the stage or whatever to get my ball they will go up and get it for me. So it is just helpful eyes watching all the time." |

Mobility support reflected the support participants received maneuvering to, from, or within the physical education environment. This support was appreciated when it increased the speed of movement beyond what the participants could manifest independently, when it helped them move about the instructional area, or when it reduced unnecessary fatigue (e.g., traversing large grassy fields to reach a playing field). A photo, taken by one of the participants, illustrated the distance she had to travel from the school building to the playing field, thereby necessitating her need for classmate support. Comments typical of the participants' experiences included:

| | |
|---|---|
| Age 7: | "They helped me climb." |
| Age 9: | "When I like try to struggle, uhm, you know, go faster with all the other kids and I can't keep up with them, they help me." |
| Age 11: | "...somebody pushing me, like I can't maneuver that fast on the grass as on the tarmac." |

Age 13: "I pick out people who can make it there pushing me and I usually take two people....Well, it's such a long way cause we have to go around the school cause you have to go out the wheelchair door and that's not by the baseball field so we have to go out the wheelchair door, around the tarmac, through a grass area, out on a sidewalk, then out on the field and go around the school, and then start going to the baseball field.... [Otherwise] I'd be all worn out and I wouldn't want to play."

Interaction with classmates that facilitated their active involvement in the class activities was responded to favorably. Classmates took on special tasks, encouraged active game positions, and acknowledged the participants' contribution by passing the equipment to them. These behaviours were deemed to be supportive of the participants' involvement in physical education, given positive evaluation, and hence perceived to be supportive of their participation. Figure 5-2 is an illustration drawn by a 7 year old participant depicting himself and his classmates in floor hockey. He commented, "I like it when they split up into teams and take shots at me and have a game and put a lot of pressure on me." Another participant (male, 11 years old) describes the photograph illustrated in Figure 5-3 by saying, "They are my friends....They are nice and kind of helpful. They pass the ball to me if I need it. Further comments were:

Age 7: "...and when I was playing floor hockey, instead of goalie, he got me to be a defense man, and one thing I really liked about Jay is when he passed the puck to me when I was trying to get my shot away in floor hockey..."

Age 9: "When everyone's playing and stuff....and they pass the ball."

Age 11: "We are playing soccer baseball right here (pointing to one of the photographs that he took). Instead of making me kick it or whatever, they make me throw it and see this guy here, he's the runner. And so I'm like a pinch hitter, so I throw it and Steve runs and if he gets to first base safe, I go in the middle between first base and second, that way it don't take as much energy for me to run as it does all the way. They don't seem to mind."

Caring Support. Assistance that was perceived to reflect caring by classmates was positively received. Acts of patience, sharing of time and interests, and social support within the group were highlighted by the participants. Support by classmates that reinforced the social values of the group, and placed the participants in a favourable light, were highly valued and considered to be self-supporting (e.g., being rewarded by classmates for trying hard, for demonstrating a good performance, or for working for the team were welcomed forms of support).

Interestingly enough, in some cases, it was what the classmates didn't do that was considered to be supportive behaviour. Classmates who didn't "get mad" at the participants were considered to be supportive of them. Not all classmates possessed the patience and tolerance referred to, as we will see later. It would appear that one person can contribute to supportive physical education experiences, however.

Age 7: "...he appreciates me....never gets mad at me and he's always a good friend."

Age 9: "Yah, they stick up for you. Alexa sticked up for me."

Age 11: "Cause they don't get kind of angry or mad at me. At anything in phys ed that I do. Like they don't really care about it, they just, like all, phys ed is all about having fun and to play."

Age 13: "Even if you let one go in they, they're, they don't get mad. They like say, 'That's alright, you'll get 'em next time."

Classmates who spent time with the participants and were perceptive of their physical needs were also acknowledged. Those who appeared to be motivated by true concern for the participants were responded to favorably. A photo depicting classmates assisting one of the participants up from the floor after a fall was a clear example of supportive behaviour. These helper characteristics provided emotional and physical support to the participants, resulting in a positive evaluation of the help and helper.

Age 7: "My friends help me...talk to me or play with me."

Age 9 "He would help you, like if you got a scrape, like he would help you up and then he would put a band-aid on you. If you got a scrape."

Age 13: "...play with you, not ignore you, not make fun of you, that sort of stuff....Yah, one best, best friend that'll never leave ya...at least you have still have one best friend that would still keep playing with you....Like they never run off by themselves."

Classmate behaviours that reinforced values held by the group were also positively regarded. The social support provided through the acknowledgment of effort, being recognized for contributing to the group, and being successful sent positive self-messages to the participants.

| | |
|---|---|
| Age 7: | "...he said that was a good try." |
| Age 9: | "They tell me I'm doing a good job." |
| Age 11: | "...like cheers me on, high fives, hand shakes, that kind of stuff." |

Consensual Help. An additional theme emerged with the later elementary age group of participants, which was not evident with the younger participants. Classmates who recognized that a 'need state' may not always exist were highly valued. In these instances, classmates asked the participants if they required support before providing it, in essence, making the participants' acceptance of help consensual. There was a sense that classmates of this age recognized the importance of achieving tasks independently.

| | |
|---|---|
| Age 11: | "Like pushing and your arms get tired, they come and say, do you need a hand pushing?" |
| Age 13: | "...if the person sees you like having trouble, then they'll come over and say, hey do you need a hand?" |

## Self-Threatening Peer Interactions

Peer support was perceived to be threatening to these participants when it conveyed a perception of dependency, or personal inadequacy, or when it obstructed their participation in activity (see Table 5-3). A common theme across the three age groups was threat to independence. Even at age 7, the participants did not want the opportunity to "do it myself" removed by overly exuberant helpers. The participants in the middle elementary age group became less accepting of classmate support that threatened their image as being "able," or if the support was offered in a reckless and unsafe manner. The threat to self-esteem theme persisted with the older group, and although reckless help was not a concern of these participants, a theme of invasive help emerged.

Loss of Independence. Support offered by classmates received a negative reaction when it was perceived to be unnecessary or it interfered with independent task completion. Classmates were considered too helpful if they removed the opportunity to practice acquired skills, precluded the learning of new skills, or interfered with self-sufficiency in the completion of the activity. In some cases, the participants' efforts to do things for themselves were discouraged, impeded, or blocked all together. When classmates continued to disregard participants' pleas to terminate the help, it resulted in negative affect toward the help and the helper. Arbitrary and externally imposed help, devoid of consideration for the participant, resulted in a rejection of the help. 'Over- helping' was expressed in comments such as:

| | |
|---|---|
| Age 7: | "...when you don't want them to help, they still help you and you got to try and tell them not to help and if they won't stop then you have to tell the teacher." |
| Age 9: | "That's what I tell them, just stop pushing me around....cause I don't like it, I don't like being pushed around." |
| Age 11: | "When I don't need help they just come and help me no matter what." |
| Age 13: | "Helpfulness gets to be annoying sometimes. You don't want somebody helping all the time..." |

Threat to Self-Esteem. Although not evident with the early elementary age group, the middle and late elementary aged participants viewed classmate support negatively when it precipitated self-evaluations and brought their self-worth into question. In these instances, helping behaviours appeared to be motivated, not by situation specific external factors, but rather, a negative evaluation of the participants' competence. The participants' capabilities to succeed in the activity were judged to be inadequate resulting in help being given. A 13 year old female participant describes what a classmate doesn't do and how that contributes to her being a friend (see Figure 5-4). She described her photograph by saying, "This is one of my best friends and she really does help me because she asks me what I want to do and if I can't do that they we will try to do something else....Sometimes people assume that I can't do stuff when I really can. Like sometimes we play volleyball and I'm catching the ball and a classmate goes up and hits before I get to it an d I miss my turn." Other participants commented:

| | |
|---|---|
| Age 9: | "Cause I have my own strength. What to you think, I don't have muscles? Because like maybe he thinks, like, I think he thinks that you don't have muscles, that you're paralyzed....Hey, what to you think, that I don't have muscles, like I'm jelly, a bowl of jelly?" |
| Age 13: | "Well, she, she is my friend, but in gym sometimes she takes, sometimes |

> she gives me a ball to throw and sometimes she doesn't give me a ball. Like if I get the ball she says, ' give it to me, I'll throw it further than you.' It doesn't really matter how far I can throw it, just if it gets over the net."

Incompetent Help. Help that put the participants in situations of physical risk emerged in the middle elementary years. Help from these classmates was considered to be incompetent and threatened the physical security of the participants. Classmates did not appear to be motivated by malice in anyway, they simply appeared to lack the necessary knowledge to help effectively. Their exuberance succeeded only in injuring or frightening the participant, placing them in a position of self-protection, as illustrated in the drawing of a 9 year old male participant (see Figure 5-5). "...it's me helping up someone who got pushed down....Like when Joey at my school was pushing me too fast and he slipped, and I got a cut here right on my left eye brow." Another participant commented:

Age 9: "...the Terry Fox Run, you know what happened? One of the grade twos that was going with us was pushing me, really fast, and I said, slow down. I had my seat belt on, that was good, and there was this bump in the sidewalk and all of a sudden I hit this bump and I went up and then slowly hit the ground."

Interfering Help. The late elementary group shared experiences of classmates interfering with their participation by getting in the way, or using the wheelchair as a means of removing them from the immediate situation. In these instances, the motivations of the classmates were not clear. What was clear, however, was the negative reaction by the participants as their goal of active and meaningful participation was restricted.

Age 13: " Sometimes I'm trying to block a person when we're playing hockey and they'll try to use my wheelchair as a way to get me out of the way, like they'll take my handle bars and try and push me out of the way and I say, in this game you don't use the wheelchair, you use your stick and your head."

Age 13: "...they're not being helpful in my eyes. They might think they are, but they're not, like stand right in front of the net....Like if I'm in goal and I say, okay guard, they'd stand right in front of me so I can't see and they're really not helping...."

## Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to clarify the meaning of everyday interactions with classmates by students with physical disabilities in physical education. The results of this descriptive study have provided modest insights into the type of support provided by classmates, the conditions under which help was considered to be desirable or not desirable, and how the ascribed meanings changed with age. Classmate behaviour contained a mixture of positive and negative self-related information. Self-related information was considered supportive if it contained messages of caring, facilitated successful participation, and reinforced self-reliance. Conversely, classmate support carried self-threatening messages when it stressed dependency, relative inferiority, or was non-instrumental (i.e., did not further the task goal, or was unnecessary). To understand the numerous considerations influencing the students' reaction to peer interactions, the early, middle, and late elementary years will be discussed in turn.

### Early Elementary

The early elementary participants were generally accepting of their interactions with classmates. They responded positively to classmate behaviour when it was perceived to be supportive of them and the task at hand and reflected an attitude of caring. Instrumental support was aimed primarily at support toward successful completion of a task and in response to external situational conditions. Classmate behaviours, which aided traversing rugged terrain en route to a playing field and acquiring or returning small equipment, or supported successful involvement by passing equipment to the participants, were considered to be self-supporting and received positive evaluation. Caring support promoted feelings of self-worth and was perceived to be supportive. Classmates reinforced effort, provided emotional support by spending time with the participants, and were patient with their performances during class activities. The motivation for support was perceived to be a genuine concern for the participants and was not clouded by issues of obligation or future compensation.

Only when the participants' desire to demonstrate independence was inhibited did they respond negatively to classmate interactions. Classmate behaviour that interfered with the participants' desire for independence was rejected. Even at the age of seven, these participants valued the opportunity to complete tasks on their own. Although previous research has suggested that children younger than seven or eight years old are unlikely to make self-threatening evaluations of support (Eisenburg, 1983), these participants were clearly unhappy when classmate behaviour was perceived to restrict their independence. Appreciation of the participants' desire for independence did not appear to be within the classmates' social frame of reference. In circumstances where task completion is considered to be secondary to the goal of independence, instrumental help could be construed as an externally imposed interruption of self-regulatory behaviour (DePaulo et al., 1983).

Richardson (1971) suggests that it may be difficult for a person with a disability to develop social relationships until the ambiguity in the extent to which the disability is primary or secondary to the other person's reactions and responses has been eliminated. Stated differently, was help provided because of a perception of inability and weakness or because of a genuine interest in helping the person with a disability successfully complete a given task, irrespective of the existence of the disability? In turn, the helper may also be unsure of the recipient's potential reaction to support. Ascertaining whether independence or task completion is of primary significance to the person, particularly when the external environmental circumstances dictate the need for support for successful completion of the task, can be difficult. An accurate understanding of the person's goal determines whether help is needed or desired and the ultimate acceptance or rejection of support.

It would appear the classmates had limited experience transferring the social norm of independence to classmates with disabilities. They did not yet possess a strategy for determining whether help was needed or wanted (e.g., ask the person if they wanted help), or they lacked the knowledge needed to interpret the situational circumstances sufficiently well to offer effective help (Ladd & Oden, 1979).

### Middle Elementary

The middle elementary age group accepted support from classmates that was instrumental (e.g., "they will pick it [equipment] up for you and give it back to you") and demonstrated caring (e.g., "they stick up for you"). Both the helper and the helpee appeared to share common understandings of the goal and contextual circumstances of the task, perhaps reflecting the emergence of the concept of empathy.

This age group was more discerning in their evaluation of support from classmates than their younger counterparts, however. A developmental difference in children's reaction to classmate support appears evident as a qualitative difference in what was considered to be self-threatening classmate behaviour surfaced (Eisenburg, 1983; Scarlett, Press, & Crockett, 1971). As with the early elementary group, help that resulted in loss of independence was rejected. Two additional themes also emerged with the middle elementary group, threat to self-esteem and reckless help. These participants appeared to not only be interested in, but also have an understanding of, the reasoning behind classmate behaviours, "...what do you think, that I don't have muscles? Like I'm a bowl of jelly?" Classmate support, motivated by a perception of inadequate internal-dispositional factors (e.g., the functional limitations of the disability), rather than external environmental factors (e.g., task difficulty), resulted in wounded state self-esteem and a negative response to assistance. Receiving help, as a person with a disability, may be a reminder of limitations, as well as an indication of perceptions of inability (whether correct or not) in the eyes of others (Nadler, Sheinberg, & Jeffe, 1981). Eisenburg (1983) suggested that adolescents (fifteen and sixteen year-olds), in some circumstances, will respond negatively to receiving assistance as a way of protecting their self-esteems. The reactions of the eleven year old participants of this study suggests that this protective reaction can occur at a much younger age.

The participants strongly opposed classmate support that removed all sense of physical control over their situation. Experiences of classmates taking control of wheelchairs and pushing in a reckless fashion were vividly recalled, "...got a cut on my eyebrow!" The help provided by classmates was threatening in that it had negative consequences for the participants (i.e., potential or real injury). The participants had little or no control over the situation and the outcome of the support, resulting in negative affect toward the help and the helpers.

Threatening help may be of two types. Controllable self-threat help occurs when threatening help is coupled with high expectations for control over future outcomes. Uncontrollable self-threat help occurs when there are low expectations of control over future outcomes (Nadler & Fisher, 1986). Controllable self-threat can elicit instrumental behavioral responses such as the investment of effort to decrease or terminate dependency. Conversely, uncontrollable self-threat may lead to noninstrumental responses such as a continued reliance on external sources of help.

Nadler and Fisher (1986) posit that the initiation of self-help depends on the interactions of self-threat and perceived control. Help that is perceived to be self-threatening and is associated with lack of control over future situations can lead to negative self-evaluations and potentially result in lack of investment in self-help behaviors. Therefore, participants who may be motivated to change current dependency (imposed by classmates in this case), but perceive themselves as unable to do so, may develop a negative helplessness-like psychological state that can lead to the potential for decreased self-esteem over the long term (Nadler & Fisher, 1986). The self-threat described by the participants would be considered controllable if it motivated them to protect their personal safety, decrease dependency, and exert control by refusing help from specific classmates, by insisting on a discussion of safe wheelchair management, or by declining support all together.

### Late Elementary

The late elementary group of participants echoed their younger counterparts' positive evaluation of instrumental and caring support. An additional self-supporting theme also emerged with this group as offers of help were reported for the first time. The assumption that the participants were in a chronic state of need faded as classmate support was no longer imposed upon the participants. The participants were given the opportunity to accept or decline offers of support. Shifting the determination of need from the perception of classmates to the actuality of the participants was a welcomed development.

Although consensual help was making an appearance among some classmates, a strong component of over-helping remained. Loss of independence was a repeated theme with this participant group. The participants no longer referred to incompetent help, but a theme of interfering help did emerge. The actions of some classmates directly interfered with or restricted their ability to participate in a meaningful and contributory way to class activities. Help of this nature was considered to be imposed, unwanted, and unnecessary as it did not possess instrumental value and removed the participant's perception of control over the situation.

Discerning the situational components, social rules, or norms that apply to persons with disabilities in situations of potential need is an inherently complex process. Morse (1983) portrayed the outcome of helping transactions in terms of task-oriented benefits and self-oriented costs, presupposing that benefits relate primarily to the task at hand, whereas costs relate primarily to the self. Task-oriented benefits would appear to be the short gain in the helping relationship. Self-oriented costs, on the other hand, may be a long term consequence of helping relationships. The socio-cultural context of our experiences reinforces that disability is manifested not only in functional limitations, but includes social and psychological consequences that stem from the reactions of others (Richardson, Hastork, & Dornbusch, 1964; Shogan, 1998).

## Summary

The support of peers can be a mixed blessing. The younger participants welcomed classmate support, appreciating the instrumental and caring nature of their interactions. Only when help suspended their independence did the participants respond with negative affect. The middle elementary aged participants were also appreciative of help that facilitated their participation in physical education. These participants were more concerned with the motivation behind the offers of peer support than their younger counterparts, however. Support that brought their competence into question was rejected, as was help that placed them at physical risk. The late elementary aged participants echoed many of the experiences of the middle group, with the addition of positive regard for help that was now being offered by some classmates rather than imposed and the replacement of incompetent help with help that hindered participation in the physical education program.

The long term impact of helping behaviour on the future promotion of self-reliance or helplessness for children with disabilities was beyond the scope of this study. The long term effects of helping behaviour is a question worthy of attention, particularly as peer tutoring models are used extensively in inclusive education settings (Gartner & Lipsky, 1990; Pugach, & Johnson, 1990; Stainback & Stainback, 1990). Accepting the support of classmates can imply a perception of incompetence, inferiority, and dependency that can lead to negative self-perceptions. If the recipient perceives that he or she unable to change a state of dependency, or have no control over future outcomes of the support, a state of

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Table 5-1 Description of Participants

| | Age in Years | Disability | Girl/Boy | Ambulatory |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PHASE I | | | | |
| | 11 | sb[a] | boy | no |
| | 11 | cp[b] | boy | yes |
| | 13 | sb | girl | no |
| Mean age | 11 years 9 months | | | |
| PHASE II | | | | |
| Early Elementary | | | | |
| | 7 | cp | boy | no |
| | 7 | cp | boy | no |
| | 7 | sb | boy | no |
| | 7 | sb | girl | no |
| Mean age | 7 years 6 months | | | |
| Middle Elementary | | | | |
| | 9 | sb | boy | no |
| | 9 | cp | boy | yes |
| Mean age | 9 years 2 months | | | |
| Late Elementary | | | | |
| | 11 | sb | boy | no |
| | 11 | sb | girl | no |
| | 13 | sb | boy | no |
| Mean age | 12 years 0 months | | | |

[a] sb = spina bifida

[b] cp = cerebral palsy

Table 5-2 Summary of Self-Supporting Themes

| Denotative Meaning | Connotative Meaning | Theme |
|---|---|---|
| "They help me put stuff away" | Equipment assistance | Instrumental Support |
| "They push me" | Mobility assistance | |
| "They pass the puck to me" | Participation assistance | |
| "They tell me I'm doing a good job" | Social support | Caring Support |
| "They spend time and play with me" | Emotional support | |
| "They don't get mad at me" | Patience | |
| "Hey, do you need a hand?" | Offer of help | Consensual Help |

Table 5-3 Summary of Self-Threatening Themes

| Denotative Meaning | Connotative Meaning | Theme |
|---|---|---|
| "Helpfulness gets to be annoying sometimes"<br>"They don't stop even when I say so" | Too much help<br>Reduction of control | Loss of independence |
| "You're no good for nothing"<br>"Give it to me, I'll throw it farther" | Questioning competence | Threat to self-esteem |
| "He was pushing me too fast" | Reckless support | Incompetent help |
| "They stand right in front of me" | Inhibited participation | Interfering help |

| | Early Elementary | Middle Elementary | Late Elementary |
|---|---|---|---|
| Self-Supporting | Instrumental Help<br>Caring Support | Instrumental Help<br>Caring Support | Instrumental Help<br>Caring Support<br>Consensual Help |
| Self-Threatening | Loss of Independence | Loss of Independence<br>Threat to Self-Esteem<br>Incompetent Help | Loss of Independence<br>Threat to Self-Esteem<br>Interfering Help |

Figure 5-1 Thematic summary, across ages, of the role of classmates in the experience of students with physical disabilities in physical education.

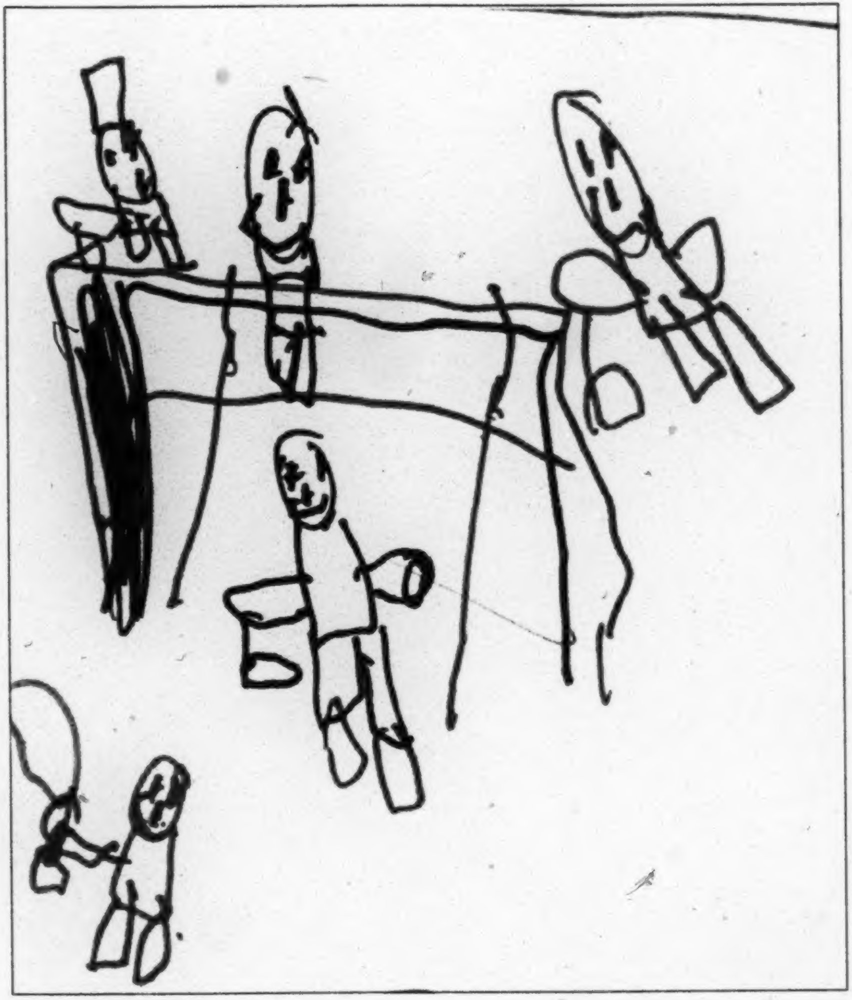

Figure 5-2 A 7 year old male participant's drawing depicting participation assistance during a floor hockey game.

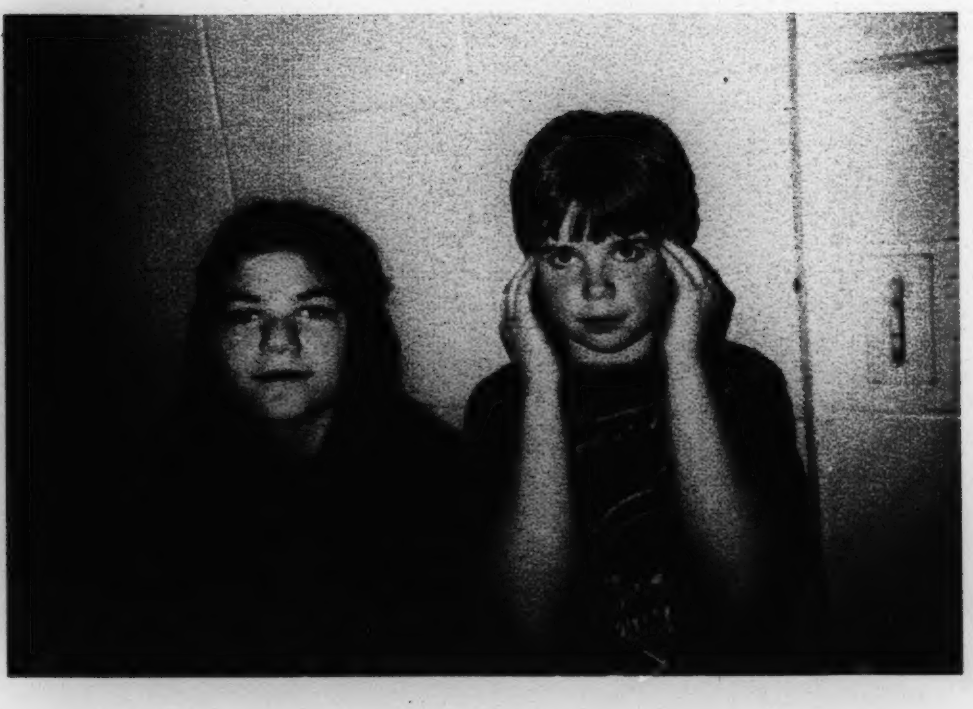

Figure 5-3 A photo taken by an 11 year old male participant of friends who supported his active participation in physical education.

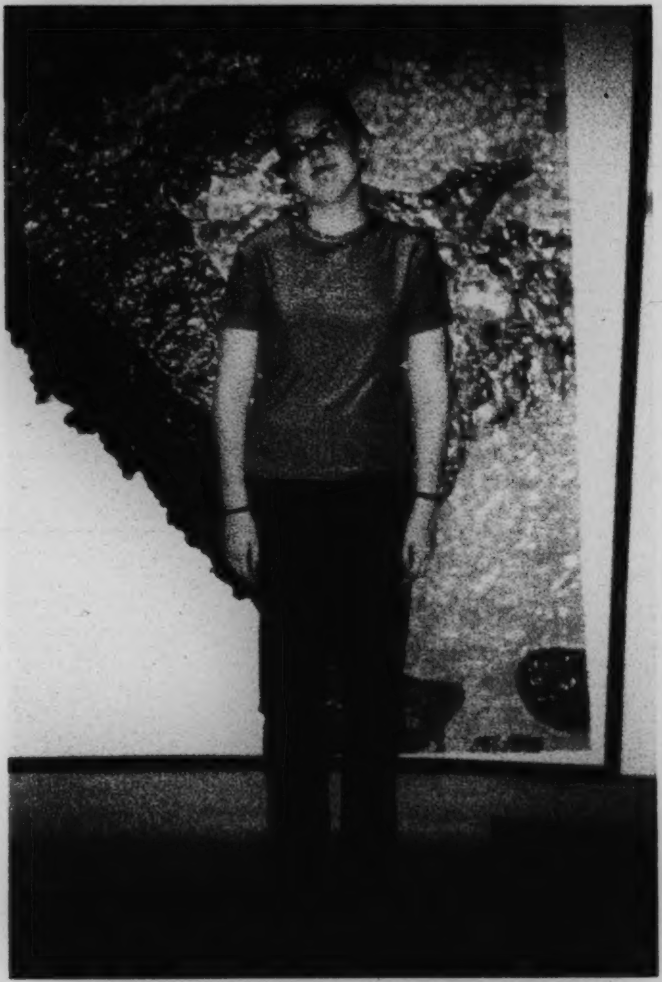

Figure 5-4 A photo taken by an 11 year old female participant depicting a friend as one who did not question her competence.

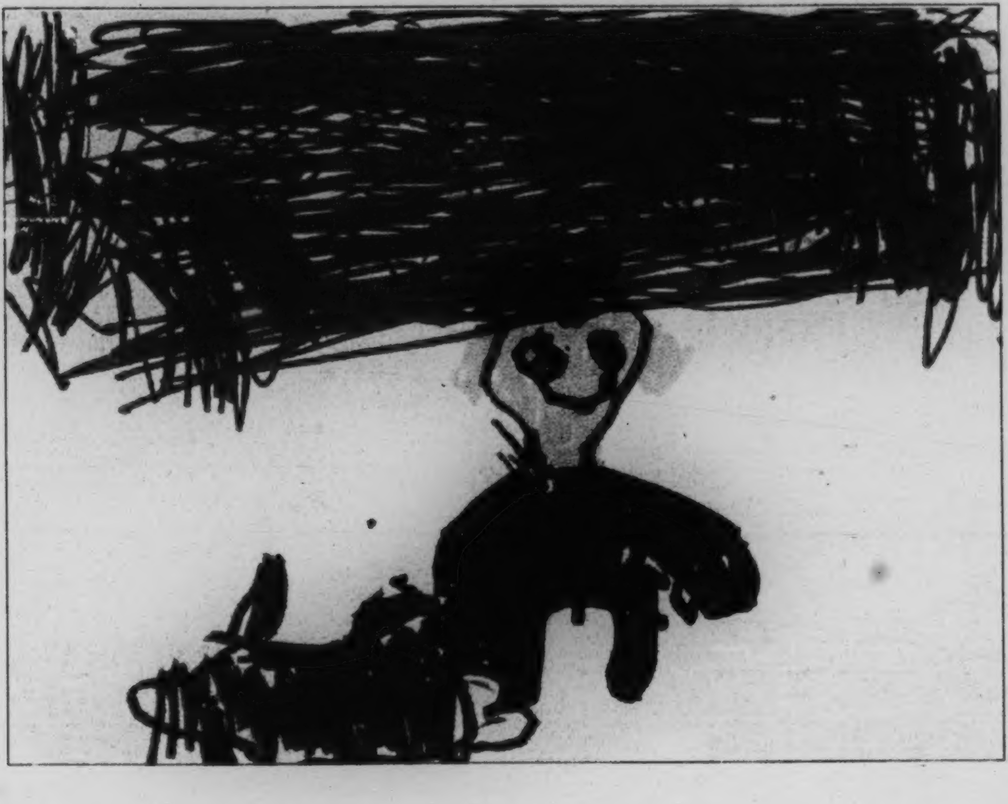

Figure 5-5 A 9 year old male participant's drawing of someone picking up a classmate who had been pushed down due to reckless support.

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# Chapter Six

## Summary and Conclusions

Research into the experience of students with disabilities in inclusive physical education has not had a long history. Simply knowing where to begin was a significant challenge. The determination of essential research questions that, when interrelated, would lead to the development of a system of concepts describing the nature of the phenomenon, was a daunting task (Dembo, Ladieu Leviton, & Wright, 1956; Forscher, 1963).

The logical first step in the process was the delineation of the phenomenon of inclusive physical education, as it was reflected in the professional and research literature. A definition of inclusive physical education was subsequently developed. The definition, in and of itself, was not sufficient, however, for the development of essential research questions. A conceptual framework was also needed to bring structure and focus to the process. A framework, which visually identified the variables comprising inclusive physical education and their relationships was created, once again, drawing upon the cumulation of previous research. As the process-product paradigm of research in the area of teaching was expanded to include student experiences as a product of education, a gap in our understanding emerged as the conceptual framework began to take form. The *experience of students* with disabilities was not well represented in the literature and subsequently became the focus of my research studies.

The first study (Chapter 3) was descriptive in nature and asked students with physical disabilities the broad question, what is the meaning of inclusive physical education? The good and bad day experiences that emerged communicated a sense of belonging or isolation that came from active or restricted participation in the program. Teachers and classmates afforded a sense of belonging when they acknowledged the efforts of the participants and supported their active involvement in the program by helping with equipment or being willing partners. The opportunity to participate meaningfully and competently toward the goals of the program contributed to positive experiences in physical education. In contrast, teachers and classmates socially isolated and restricted participation when lessons were conducted on soft playing surfaces far removed from the school, or when classmates ignored the participants during game play. Name calling, being overlooked all together, or being seen as objects of curiosity isolated the participants even further.

The preeminence of classmates in the experience of these students was the basis for, and focus of, the second study. An investigation into the role of classmates in the experience of inclusive physical education indicated that peers of 7 or 8 years of age were perceived to be supportive and well intentioned in their interactions. Instrumental help that assisted with successful task completion was welcomed by the participants.

The experiences of these participants lends empirical support to the need for supported participation, as identified in the definition of inclusive physical education. In this particular study, the support was specific to peers. The need for, nature, and extent of other supplementary aides and support services requires ongoing examination.

The older students were more discerning in their interpretation of peer interactions than their younger counterparts. By age 9 or 10, attention to the motivation behind peer support emerged. The participants reacted with negative affect toward both the help and the helper when classmate support was perceived to be precipitated by the helpers' perceived lack of confidence in the participants' ability. In other cases, the help was so overwhelming it led to a loss of independence. By 11 or12 years of age however, peer support was becoming less intrusive. The participants indicated that there were occasions when they were asked if they needed help.

The experience of inclusive physical education for students with disabilities was closely tied to the value structure of those around them. I venture to say that the participants in the 2 studies were struggling to overcome subjective appraisals of their ability by teachers and classmates. The social isolation experienced appeared to be rooted in classmate devaluation of the participants' contribution to the activities, arising from the presence of physical disabilities. The participants shared instances of being stared or laughed at. Their bodies, and the movement of their bodies, became objects of curiosity that set them apart from their classmates. Society's notion of the ideal body being without blemish or fault has resulted in "able bodiedness" being the primary measure against which judgements of functional ability are ascribed (Devine, 1997; Condeluci, 1995;

Vlahogiannis, 1998). The further we deviate from the image of the normative body, the more our value is brought into question. In essence, our worth, in the eyes of others, is devalued.

Evidence of the participants' devalued personal worth was reflected in global statements such as "you're no good." These preconceptions of incompetence were closely associated with restrictions to participation. Teachers limited participation by assigning non participatory duties (e.g., cleaning up the equipment room) and classmates marginalized the participants' contribution to the activity by not passing to them or by turn taking for them. When help was provided by classmates, it appeared to be motivated by their need to compensate for perceived shortcomings in the participants' performance capability.

The participants' negative reflection of their experiences suggests that they considered themselves to be equally worthy members of the group and felt they should be accepted as full participating members of the group. When the values of the group were also their experienced values there was a sense of belonging. Through active participation in the program, the benefits of the program, as enjoyed by classmates, also became their benefits, affirming the appropriateness of the goals of the regular physical education program. Their contribution to the group was acknowledged as they received encouragement, instrumental support, and positive feedback from teachers and classmates. Support was instrumental and accepted when the locus of support was external to the participant, that is, the difficulty of the task or the constraints of the environment necessitated the need for support to retrieve equipment. The lack of ability was no longer central to needing assistance or the implementation of a no strike out rule.

What can be concluded from two descriptive studies in an area with little previous research upon which to draw? Although the results themselves pose more questions than they provide answers, it was clear that students with physical disabilities can portray their worlds when asked and listened to carefully. The accounts of some experiences were not as rich or revealing as others, but each participant had something to say in his or her own right. Participant generated drawings and photographs provided a tangible focus for the discussions and were useful in prompting recollections. They also provided valuable information in and of themselves. Capturing the lived experiences of students with disabilities in physical education was a rewarding experience, rich in detail and insight.

The results of the study on student experiences in physical education (Chapter 3) contributed to the ecological validity of the definition of inclusive physical education presented in Chapter 2. The participants embraced the goals of physical education as relevant and beneficial to them. Skill acquisition, psychosocial well being, fitness, and knowledge were all identified as reasons why physical education was important to them. As the premise of inclusive education hinges on the applicability and appropriateness of the mainstream educational program for all students, the affirmation of the goals of the program by students with disabilities was a needed and welcomed finding.

The appropriateness of the regular physical education program, identified as the *instructional program* within the conceptual framework (Chapter 2), would thereby also appear to have merit. The experiences of the students of this study, lend empirical support to that which has already been suggested by leaders within the field of adapted physical education - an adapted physical education curriculum, separate from that of the regular program, is not needed (Stein, 1987, Davis & Burton, 1991). The degree to which specific activities within the curriculum program dimensions (individual and dual activities, outdoor pursuits, aquatics, etc.) are relevant and appropriate to students with disabilities is open to further discussion, however.

## Future Research Questions

While collecting data for the second study, the resilience of the students was apparent. Physical education, in spite of repeated negative experiences, was still a fun and desirable place to be. These students were able to develop positive self-help behaviors that allowed them to cope with ongoing challenges to their self-esteem (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Their resilience prompted a third study of inclusive physical education, which is currently underway. It addresses the self-regulatory processes of self-observation, judgement, and reaction to inclusive physical education situations they perceive to be stressful (Andrew & Tracy, 1996).

The conceptual framework provided structure for a number of additional questions that emerged from the completed studies. Within the region of *student variable*, a question arose as to the preparedness of the students to take advantage of the affording qualities of the instructional setting. Do students with physical disabilities perceive, attend to, or actively seek out affordances that are to their advantage in physical education? Both the positive and negative affording qualities of the physical education instructional environment were evident in the students' experiences (Chapter 3). Would students be more active decision makers and requesters of choice with the introduction and encouraged use of affordances? For example, what process is needed to facilitate the identification and manipulation of the affording qualities of equipment or the playing surface? Can students be encouraged to be initiators of strategies that would guide their own learning in physical education? How do students become aware of the constraints that can impact the quality of their experiences and how can they then be used to their best advantage? Preparing students to take full advantage of affordances that contribute to positive experiences, while minimizing the constraining qualities of those that do not, would appear to be integral to the development of student self-determination.

To increase students' awareness of affordances in physical education, teachers may also need to be cognizant of environmental affordances that can constrain students' experiences. Introducing the notion of affordances to teachers may support the operationalization of what van Manen (1993) refers to as "tactful teaching", or what has been referred to within the conceptual framework as *thoughtful instruction*.

The provision of instrumental support was an illustration of the *shared responsibility* variable outlined in the conceptual framework of inclusive physical education appearing in Chapter 2. Classmates shared the responsibility of facilitating active and meaningful participation of their classmates with disabilities. Inclusive education settings utilize the instructional strategy of tutoring to meet the diversity of learning needs. It affords the opportunity of individualized attention on student specific material. But is it producing more than support for participation? The social context determines the degree to which the tutee perceives control over future learning situations and whether future investments of energy will bring about change. Support can be a motivator to reduce dependency on external support when the reason for the help is not attributed to internal or personal reasons. When the need for help is attributed to internal, uncontrollable factors, however, it may be a precipitator of increasing dependency on external support. The long term impact of tutoring for students with disabilities should not be overlooked. Questions, such as the following, remain unanswered. Does peer tutoring in physical education remove the opportunity for students to exercise independence in their completion of tasks or interfere with the ability to utilize self-regulatory strategies? What is the impact of ongoing support on self-esteem and self-efficacy of students with disabilities in physical education settings, and across the entire school day?

The process by which the values of the group are extended to persons with disabilities is complex and ripe for further investigation. Or perhaps the question would be better framed from a disability perspective. What are the social norms or rules around which help is appropriate and instrumental to the goals of persons with disabilities? What social interchanges fall within the rubric of help and under what circumstances can or does this interchange change from help to something else? What self-evaluation or appraisal process takes place in this determination? Is the helping behavior that is developed by normative pressures to which we become socialized different from what is normative for persons with disabilities, or is it our interpretation of those values for persons with disabilities that is different?

Although the two studies described addressed the physical education experience from the perspective of students with disabilities, if we return to the conceptual framework, insights into the *value system of some teachers* can be cautiously inferred. Relegating students to non participatory roles, giving them the option of declining participation, or contributing to restricted participation may be a reflection of the medical model value system. A value system which defines our perceptions of disability in terms of loss of function, impairment, personal weakness, and the need for remediation, when applied to an educational setting, may result in discord between the physical education program and the ability for students with disabilities to take part in or benefit from participation in it. The value system of the teachers, as was identified within the conceptual framework, would appear to be an important contributor to the ultimate experiences of students with disabilities in physical education. Continued thoughtful investigation into this component of the conceptual framework is called for.

Alleviating adverse experiences in physical education may require a shift away from the value constructs of disability portrayed by the medical model. The 'deconstruction' of the assumptions of the medical model, with discussions surrounding the social construction of disability, may enlarge the scope of values associated with disability (Condeluci, 1991; Shogan, 1998). The "sickness" metaphor is being supplanted with a minority group "discrimination" metaphor (Woodill, 1994). Emphasizing the biological, in isolation from the social environment, may have contributed to persons with disabilities not assuming normal role obligations in society, or being prevented from fulfilling them even when capable of doing so. Persons with disabilities were often seen as needing help and social support.

Contemporary models for understanding disability are shifting the traditional medical view to a "minority group" view. As such, the image of 'sickness' shifts to one of 'discrimination'. Exemption from social responsibility shifts to one of removing and preventing repressive attitudes of those outside of the minority group. Solidarity of members becomes a source of strength as members begin to emphasize the disabling nature of society and recognize their own disability culture (DePauw, 1997). The minority group metaphor is evident in the emergence of disability culture. The Deaf community, with its own language, traditions, and history have defended their culture as unique and may be leading the way in the legitimization of disability culture (Woodill, 1994).

The notion of disability culture is well suited to the socially responsible precept of empowerment of persons with disabilities. Bandura (1997) reminds us that, although the construct of empowerment has been identified as the vehicle by which persons with disabilities will have better lives, it has been infused with a great deal of promotional and grandiose rhetoric. Empowerment is not bestowed upon a person, but it is gained through the development of personal efficacy. Personal efficacy enables people to take advantage of opportunities and to remove constraints, constraints often built around issues of power and control over resources. Shifting ideology to the merits and benefits of shared power and control can require concerted effort over long periods of time. For this reason, the combined efforts of a group, whose members share a common concern, and have the means by which to act, are needed to bring about an "enabling process" (Bandura, 1997, p. 477).

A firm belief that people can bring about change creates an environment for the process of enablement, or empowerment if you will, to unfold (Ramcharan & Grant, 1994). The stories of students with disabilities need to be told and shared. By giving voice to persons with disabilities in our research, we may in some small way, be contributing to the creation of an environment for change.

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